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THE GOSPEL OF THE KINGDOM

REV. FREDERICK CLIFTON GRANT

St. Luke's Church, Evanston, Illinois

CHAPTER I

THE NATURE OF THE KINGDOM

And he said, How shall we liken the Kingdom of God, or in what parable shall we set it forth?—Mark 4:30.

It may be said that the teaching of Jesus concerning the Kingdom of God represents his whole teaching. It is the main, determinative subject of all his discourse. His ethics was ethics of the Kingdom; his theology was theology of the Kingdom; his teaching regarding himself cannot be understood apart from his interpretation of the Kingdom of God. And it may not only be said that all his teaching had relation to the Kingdom, but also all his action, everything he did. From the day of his baptism, when the consciousness of his messianic vocation came over him and the divine Voice proclaimed with unmistakable clearness, "Thou art my beloved Son, in thee I am well pleased," from that day, all the events of his life until the final, culminating event, the crucifixion, had reference to the coming of the Kingdom. From the baptism on, his whole life was dedicated to the mission of announcing its approach and of calling men to prepare for entering it upon the conditions which by divine authority he announced.

Our first duty is to learn what the term, "the Kingdom of God," meant to those who heard him. This phrase was the watchword of the Jewish national hope, and represented the object of a widespread popular expectation. But it was understood in a number of

different ways. Such variety was only natural in a hope as popular as that of the Kingdom; we have only to compare the term "democracy" in our own day, which serves to represent a number of varying ideals. Yet in the main, as common to all the varied forms, the Jews looked for a complete and universal revolution in human affairs, in which God should manifest his power and free his people, the Jews; should judge and punish the other nations, and cleanse his people from sin; thereafter he should set up his Kingdom, and the Messiah, his Anointed, should reign forever or for an appointed time as his vice-gerent. Upon this restored and exalted nation were abundantly to descend the divine blessings of peace and prosperity. It was the great future that lay before the Jewish nation, the future which was sure to come, as it was foreordained in the eternal counsels and had been promised to the Fathers. Thus was the old ideal of the theocracy finally to be realized. Thus was the rule of Jehovah over all the earth to be made absolute, tangible, manifest.

It was the Jewish faith that, as the author of "Daniel" expressed it, "The Kingdom of the Most High is an everlasting Kingdom; and all dominions shall serve and obey him." Or, in the words of one of the old hymns of the Psalter,

God is the King of all the earth
 God reigneth over the nations:
 God sitteth upon his holy throne
 Great is Jehovah, and greatly to be praised
 For this God is our God forever and ever.

The scribes spoke of obedience to the Law as "taking upon one the yoke of the Kingdom of heaven." In this sense God's Kingdom is already established. But nevertheless, and this made the fact a paradox, the Jews, God's own people, were suffering the shame and the tyranny of foreign domination. The empires of Babylon, Persia, Macedon, and Rome had risen and engulfed them. So their prayer became, as in the Prayer Book collect, "O Lord, raise up thy power and come among us." "Redeem Israel, O God, out of all his troubles." The hope in the future centered, then, in a restoration of Israel to the glory of former days, to freedom and

independence, which should be effected by the manifestation of God's justice and power in judging and punishing the oppressing nations, and in sending the Messiah, his representative, to be their ruler. This vast change in the affairs of the world was to usher in the Kingdom of God, the era of peace, of righteousness, of law-abiding and law-loving, of prosperity, of faith, of all blessing, material and spiritual.

The variety in form in which this hope expressed itself was due to different conceptions of the method by which God rules the world, and by which he would establish his Kingdom in the end. Some men looked for mere political change, a "redemption" of the nation from its bondage to foreign domination. They looked back upon the glories of the old Davidic empire and longed for its restoration. For them the Messiah was the coming one who should rise from the ranks of the people, arouse his countrymen, and by the power of God free the nation. He was to be the political savior. Needless to say, this was in no necessary sense a spiritual or even religious conception of the Kingdom. It led to continual discontent among the more vigorous of the nationalists, and to feverish, reckless enthusiasms for each new self-proclaimed Messiah.

Others looked for a great irruption of the supernatural in signs and wonders, and invasion of the earth by celestial armies, the hosts of Heaven, with the divine Messiah at their head, the Son of Man coming from the presence of the throne of the Most High to set up the reign of God at once. For the "one like unto a son of man" in Daniel's vision¹ had come to be understood to mean the Messiah, who was called accordingly "the Son of Man," among the dreamers of strange dreams, the apocalyptic enthusiasts. The sun should be darkened, the stars of heaven should fall, the sea should be disturbed, and great portents appear, men's hearts failing them for fear of those things coming upon the earth. The dead were to be raised, the judgment was to be set, and the righteous were to enter into life and joy and everlasting bliss—all of which was to be the supernatural carrying-out of a divinely foreordained program. "The powers of the earth should be shaken," for the powers of nature were under the dominion of wicked spirits; the

¹ Dan. 7:13.

first act in this drama of the coming of the Kingdom was to be the destruction of the usurping power of evil.

Still others looked with longing eyes to the coming time with little or no speculation as to its form, its outward signs and glories. For them it was an era of righteousness and peace and blessing from God.

Thus different persons conceived it in different ways. The imaginative pictured it in glowing colors of the imagination. To the burning hearts of patriots it was pictured as a great redemption from national servitude. To quiet, peace-loving souls, men just and blameless, saints like Zacharias, Mary and Joseph, Simeon, Anna the prophetess, it was hardly pictured in any distinct way at all.¹ They trusted simply that it was full of good things from God, a time when men could worship God without let or hindrance and when true piety should flourish. This was sufficient for them; they could leave the rest to God.

One reason which may be adduced to account for the variety and inconsistency in Jewish eschatology is found in the fact that Judaism was based upon an ethical and ceremonial code, which not only left the fancy wholly unfettered in the realm of religious ideas, but left it without guidance or direction of any definite sort.² And possibly most persons viewed the Kingdom in different ways as they found themselves in different moods, or as for the time political or moral or spiritual or ecclesiastical problems engaged their thought. It was thus that the different generations of the past had expressed the hope in various ways, as they passed through different moods, or were engrossed with different problems, national, individual, temporal, or spiritual. And this variety was sustained by the practice of reading the Scriptures in the synagogue; for the Old Testament itself exemplified and legitimized this variety in the thought of the past.

Toward the close of the third decade of the first century the ears of his languid, heartless, but uneasy generation were startled by the voice of John the son of Zacharias, preaching a baptism of repentance in the wilderness about the lower Jordan and announ-

¹ Luke 1:46 ff., 68 ff.

² Cf. Schürer, *GJV*, II⁴, 408-14 (3d ed., pp. 335-50).

cing the impending arrival of the Kingdom of God. The Messiah was shortly to appear, with a baptism of the Holy Ghost and of fire, "whose fan is in his hand, and he will thoroughly cleanse his threshing-floor; and he will gather his wheat into the garner, but the chaff will he burn up with unquenchable fire." John's eschatology seems to have been of the high or pharisaic-apocalyptic type, with a transcendent Messiah, coming from heaven, equipped with supernatural powers. But the Baptist was no visionary, like the majority of the ardent apocalyptists; he was a preacher of repentance, with a message of righteousness. "*Even now* the axe lieth at the root of the trees: every tree therefore that bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire!" And when the multitudes gathered about him asking, What, then, must we do? he answered, "He that hath two coats, let him impart to him that hath none; and he that hath food, let him do likewise." To the publicans he commanded, "Extort no more than that which is appointed you"; to the soldiers, "Extort from no man by violence, neither accuse any one wrongfully; and be content with your wages." To every class of men who came he explained the peremptory demand of righteousness, in view of the coming Judgment of the Messiah, to precede the establishment of the Kingdom.

In submitting to John's baptism our Lord undoubtedly indicated his acceptance of John's teaching regarding the Kingdom and the Messiah and his desire to share in this momentous "messianic movement." On no occasion, so far as we know, did he undertake to correct John's view of the Kingdom or of the Messiah. The reply which he sent to John through the messengers¹ is no exception; it was meant simply to stay the Baptist's flagging faith in Jesus himself as the Promised One.

Following John's imprisonment in the castle of Machaerus, Jesus returned to Galilee, carrying with him John's great message, "The Kingdom of God is at hand: repent." Thus he at once called his hearers' attention to the many-sided one, and popular national hope, without, however, attempting to define that hope in any new terms of his own. Each man having his own idea of the Kingdom,

¹ Matt. 11:2-6.

our Lord stated to each his message; it caught the attention immediately. He then let men find out for themselves what he meant by the words, though his connection with John the Baptist's preaching must have given them some hint beforehand as to what this would be. It was part of his method not to preface his announcement by a discourse on the nature of the Kingdom; rather, he left undisturbed, for the moment, the conception of the Kingdom which his hearers had in mind. And more than this, he adopted the phraseology of their conceptions, adapting and utilizing the popular ideas in his teaching. Thus was established what we should call a "point of contact," upon our modern pedagogical principle of "apperception." Thus he led men naturally to inquire what new light he had to offer on the particulars of the coming time, what exactly he meant by the Kingdom. What did he mean?

1. In the first place, by "the Kingdom of God" he meant something in the future. The Kingdom is "at hand," it is soon to come; this was his very first message in Galilee and the message which he sent out his disciples to proclaim much later in his ministry. The prayer which he taught them contained the petition, "Thy Kingdom come." On one occasion he said, "I tell you truly, there are some standing here who shall in no wise taste of death till they see the Kingdom of God come with power." He pointed to his miracles in proof that, the divine, supernatural power of God being thus made manifest, the Kingdom was about to be set up: "If I by the Spirit of God cast out demons, then is the Kingdom of God come upon you." He spoke of the time when "the Son of Man shall come in the glory of his Father with the holy angels." When the sons of Zebedee came to him with the request, "Grant unto us that we may sit, one on thy right hand and one on thy left hand, in thy glory" (that is, when he should have set up this Kingdom and be ruling over it), he did not repudiate their expectation of the future coming of the Kingdom, but instead rebuked their presumption. At his trial he said to the high priest, in admitting his claim to be the Messiah, "Ye shall see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of Power and coming with the clouds of heaven," coming to judge the earth and to set up the divine everlasting Kingdom.

Thus far, at least, he used the term in the same way in which everyone else used it. No one would have understood him to mean anything else than the hoped-for Kingdom of the future, unless he had explained that he meant something else, when he announced that the Kingdom of God was at hand. And the simple fact is that he made no such explanation. Rather the futurity of the Kingdom was fundamental to his whole thought. But he did explain that he meant something else in regard to its essential nature than the commonly received doctrine of his contemporaries.

2. For, in the second place, he did not mean a political kingdom. Here began the great line of cleavage between him and his generation. The crowds which followed him in Galilee and honored him as a new, inspired, God-sent prophet would gladly have followed him in rebellion against the Roman authorities, in the hope of freeing the nation, like another Judas Maccabaeus. At one time they did try to take him by force and make him their king.¹ But he withdrew to the mountain alone and in the night went away secretly. He had faced that temptation in the wilderness, after his baptism, when Satan showed to him all the kingdoms of the world, and offered them to him on condition that he forsake his high calling and satisfy the longings of his people for political freedom. He had met that temptation and had conquered it; it was no longer a temptation. "My Kingdom is not of this world." It was popularly rumored that he claimed to be a king; probably his messiahship was so understood by some who learned the secret, and they let it be known that he was the one destined to bring in the Kingdom, understood as a political institution. The populace took this up and hailed him as "Son of David," which title and its associations he alike repudiated. This then became the charge preferred against him before Pilate: "He maketh himself a king."² This was the point of the intended bitter mockery in the inscription on the cross, "Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews." This was the reason for the choice of the mob, "Release Barabbas, and crucify Jesus"; for Barabbas was a brigand and agitator, a popular

¹ John 6:15; compare to this the disciples' cries of salutation at his entry into Jerusalem, Luke 19:38.

² Luke 23:2.

adventurer, who had, for all his crimes, made some attempt at political revolution. Men were disappointed in Jesus. "We thought that this was he who should redeem Israel."

Far from ever claiming to be a king in an earthly sense, our Lord most positively disclaimed it. The narrow selfish patriotism of the day had no hold upon him. To the minds of his fellow-countrymen, the Kingdom was to be theirs alone, and all other nations were to be shut out. "Thou didst create the world for thy people; and as for the other peoples, which also come from Adam, thou hast said that they are as nothing, but be like unto spittle; and hast likened the abundance of them unto a drop that falleth from a vessel."¹ This was a sentiment all too popular in our Lord's day; upon such evil times had fallen that noble spirit of independence which flamed so high in the days of the Maccabees. Against it, our Lord set himself in direct opposition. "Many shall come from the east and the west and shall sit down with Abraham and Isaac and Jacob in the Kingdom of heaven; but the sons of the Kingdom shall be cast forth into outer darkness."² It is strange that the speaker of these words should have been mistaken for a claimant to the fallen throne of David!

Our Lord was not unpatriotic. He loved the temple and cleansed it, the religion, and the sacred writings of his fathers; it was his temple, his Father's house, and his religion, and the ancient Scriptures were the sacred revelation of God's will. Only the most superficial student of the Gospels will fail to perceive our Lord's natural and implicit recognition of the national religious institutions of his day—a recognition which exceeded, while yet it included, the simple adherence of patriotism. But his patriotism was different in kind from the patriotism of his contemporaries and fellow-countrymen. He wept for Jerusalem in view of its impending destruction. "If thou hadst known in this thy day the things that were for thy peace!" Yet the privileges and blessings of Judaism were not for selfish enjoyment. "Ye are the light of the world." It was the duty of Judaism, so specially enlightened by God's revelation, to "lighten the Gentiles," as the prophet had said. And the temple was meant to be, as in the old Scripture, "a house of prayer for all nations."

¹ IV Ezra 6:55 ff.

² Matt. 8:11 f.

All this sounded heterodox in the ears of the Pharisees of his generation. They could not conceive a Kingdom of God in which there was no place for national prerogatives, at least for legal prerogatives, special privileges for those who knew and observed the divine Law. To their minds, a prophet, such as Jesus of Nazareth claimed to be, who began by being a heretic, could hardly end in any other way than by being a blasphemer. Therefore they took steps to procure his death. And so he died, a traitor to the national hope, as they conceived it; a heretic to the national religion, as they understood it; a blasphemer against their notion of God.

3. There are sayings in which our Lord speaks of the Kingdom as already existing. Thus he said to the scribe, "Thou art not far from the Kingdom of God." In parables he said, "The Kingdom of heaven is like leaven . . . like mustard-seed . . . like a pearl . . . like hidden treasure." There is no doubt great difficulty in reconciling this conception of the Kingdom as already existing and the conception of the Kingdom as still to be realized in the future. They can be reconciled only by recognizing their identity. The Kingdom already set up is no more than the Kingdom of God the Creator, which has always existed, perfect in the heavens. The Kingdom which is still in the future is no less than the realization of this everlasting Kingdom upon earth. "Thy Kingdom come: Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven." This Kingdom, already existing, was fully recognized in Jewish thought. Indeed, the Kingdom of the future would have been impossible without it. For example, the idea of this cosmic everlasting Kingdom of God was expressed in the Psalter:

Jehovah is good to all,
And his tender mercies are over all his works.
All thy works shall give thanks to thee, O Jehovah;
And thy saints shall bless thee.
They shall speak of the glory of thy Kingdom,
And talk of thy power;
To make known to the sons of men his mighty acts,
And the glory of the majesty of his Kingdom.
Thy Kingdom is an everlasting Kingdom,
And thy dominion endureth throughout all generations.¹

¹ Ps. 145:9-13; compare to this the "Benedicite omnia opera," or Song of the Three Children.

This idea of the Kingdom is not to be contrasted with the idea of the Kingdom yet to be established. For this Kingdom, already existing, is the one which is to be set up. It is now existing in heaven in perfect state; it is to be set up upon earth shortly. And this Kingdom of the whole universe really guarantees the fulfilment and consummation of the particular Kingdom at the end. Our Lord, being a Jew, using the language and sharing the thought of his day, even while he remolded and transformed both, thought and spoke of the Kingdom of God in these two ways. In that old and popular apocalypse, the Book of Daniel, it was written, "His Kingdom is an everlasting Kingdom," that is, it has been set up from the beginning and is to be seen in nature and in history, both of which offer indications of God's rule in the world; and yet the full realization of this has never been accomplished upon earth, but is still to be accomplished, when "all dominions shall serve and obey him." The Kingdom is both now and hereafter; is latent now, hereafter to be made actual; is true of heaven now, hereafter to be true in the world of men. The Kingdom of God is an everlasting Kingdom, and yet it has not so far been established upon earth; it is universal, and yet limited to the heavens above; it has been from all eternity, and yet must "come" into the here and now. This paradox goes back to the very beginnings of the hope of the Kingdom—God is King already, and yet his Kingdom must come, it is still in the future. And, also, this paradox reaches forward through all the centuries, and penetrates all theistic thought. The Kingdom of the heavens is an accomplished fact already; it has never been less since the first fiat of creation; and the coming Kingdom of God on earth means the realization among men of this celestial sovereignty. The Kingdom of the heavens must be brought down to earth. The sway of God must be extended till it include all the world. The Kingdom, although at this moment existing with God, must be given to men as a blessed new government over human affairs; it must "come." The Creator must conquer his creation; the Redeemer must redeem his own from Satan's tyranny; the Savior must drive out the evil and rebellious spirits that tempt men to sin and that scourge them with diseases; the Monarch of all must subdue a seditious province

of his domain and fully establish his Kingdom. "Then cometh the end."¹

And, as our Lord looked back upon his activity, he saw that this was what had actually begun to take place. In his "mighty works" the Kingdom of God was already, in a measure, come. It was begun, God's perfect rule over the earth; and only time was needed for its full realization. It was like leaven, and the leaven was already stirred into the meal; it was like mustard seed, and the seed was already sown; it was like a precious pearl, like hidden treasure, and men had already seen it and were selling their goods to purchase. Men could already, therefore, be spoken of as members of the Kingdom; the Son of Man could be regarded as the Messiah, although the full manifestation of the Kingdom was not yet, and the time remained still in the Father's keeping when the complete realization of the joys of membership in the Kingdom and the regal position of the Messiah should be possible. To his disciples he could say, as they reported the success of their exorcisms, "I beheld Satan as lightning fall from heaven";² Satan's fall was the very beginning of the end. To his enemies, who were attempting to malign him with the imputation of confederacy with Beelzebub, he replied, "If I by the Spirit of God cast out demons, then is the Kingdom of God come upon you."³ The time was indeed "fulfilled"; every day made that more apparent; and the Kingdom of God was at hand, ready to appear at any moment.

4. It is a common assumption at the present day that the Kingdom of God, as taught by our Lord, was a social ideal, a utopia, to be set up by men themselves as the perfect organization of human society. Men were to become just and upright, and then the era of public justice and social righteousness which should follow might be called "the Kingdom of God." His preaching of righteousness, the righteousness of God and of the Kingdom, is viewed as a program for immediate social amelioration.

Now, it is not to be doubted that he thought of the Kingdom as embracing social life; there was a human society within the Kingdom. He promised to his disciples that they should "sit on twelve

¹ Compare Paul's eschatology in I Cor. 15:24-26.

² Luke 10:18.

³ Matt. 12:28.

thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel."¹ And at the Last Supper he said to them, "I will no more drink of the fruit of the vine until I drink it new with you in my Father's Kingdom."² To the dying thief he promised, "Today shalt thou be with me in Paradise."³ In the company of the patriarchs would be found many from the east and from the west.⁴ The Kingdom of God is inevitably social, for it is to embrace humanity, human souls.⁵

But in general he discouraged speculation as to the form of social life in the Kingdom, even as he discouraged speculation regarding the exact time of its advent. *All this was within the Father's keeping.* To the person who sat at meat with him and said, "Blessed is he that shall eat bread in the Kingdom of God," he replied with a parable upon heeding the invitation to the Great Supper.⁶ His concern was not with the form of the Kingdom, but with the righteousness requisite to entrance; that, he insisted upon. The bewildering variety in form of the Jewish hope only furnished him material for parables of the Kingdom's coming. He used this material so freely and so inconsistently because he did not take it wholly seriously. What he did take seriously was not the form in which the imagination of his contemporaries had clothed it, but the tremendous fact of the Kingdom's impending arrival; that, and the fact of his generation's unpreparedness. The Kingdom was like a field, a harvest, an invading army, seed, treasure, a great banquet, a variety of things; but all these were only figures; and he was not concerned with the allegorical exactness, let alone the literal truth, of the figure, but with men's preparation for the Kingdom. For the Kingdom itself transcended all human power of description, if not of conception.

¹ Matt. 19:28.

³ Luke 23:43.

² Matt. 26:29.

⁴ Matt. 8:11, quoted above.

⁵ It is to be feared that the term "social" is frequently used today in a loose, materialistic, and mechanical sense. Essentially, such a meaning is incorrect; "economic" is often the better word. The term "social" leads us at once into a spiritual situation. There are social sins; but there are no economic sins, though of course social sins are committed by economic means, such as, for example, the vice known as "cornering the market." Our Lord's gospel is social because it is a gospel addressed to human souls, a gospel of spiritual regeneration which is necessarily to bear its fruits in social life, the life in which these souls stand related to one another.

⁶ Luke 14:15-24.

Now, for a social reformer to lay so little importance upon the form of his ideal is rather strange. For a social reformer to anticipate the end of the world inside a generation is stranger still. Strangest of all is the representation of the one who thought of himself as the promised Messiah in the rôle of a social meliorist. For social amelioration takes time; and for him time had all but passed away. Beyond a doubt he looked upon the Kingdom as the divinely wrought regeneration of the world. It was to be a new age, a new earth, a new and transformed human society. But in this regeneration the old relationships were to come to an end. After the resurrection even family ties were to be dissolved. "They neither marry nor are given in marriage, but are like the angels in heaven."¹ It was a new world that he anticipated, a new world that is another world; not the progressive amelioration toward perfection of this present one. This new world was to be the work of divine creation—*God's* Kingdom. "Human effort could not bring the Kingdom one finger's breadth the nearer."²

In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus set up a new standard of righteousness. "Ye have heard that it was said to them of old time . . . but I say unto you. . . ." The principle upon which he transformed and deepened the ancient Law was that of the inner motive. "Thou shalt not steal; thou shalt not even covet"—so far the old Law had deepened of itself the application. But our Lord said simply, "Have no anxiety for the food and raiment of the body."³ "Thou shalt not kill"; nay, thou shalt not hate thy brother.⁴ "Thou shalt not commit adultery"; nay, beware even the unguarded look.⁵ The new righteousness was thus deeper and higher, profounder in grasp and more ideal in vision, broader in application and yet more pointed than the righteousness required by the Mosaic Law. Its principle drove straight down into the root motives of human conduct: "Not that which is from without defileth a man, but that which proceedeth from within, from the heart."⁶ "Out of the heart are the issues of life."

¹ Matt. 22:30.

² Bousset, *Jesus*, p. 34.

³ Matt. 6:25.

⁴ Matt. 5:22.

⁵ Matt. 5:27 f.

⁶ Mark 7:20 f.

This righteousness was the absolute prerequisite to entrance into the Kingdom. It was essential to entrance; but it was not the essence of the Kingdom itself. When God's Kingdom comes, then men will practice righteousness, then they will do the will of their Father in heaven; and entrance into the Kingdom depends upon actually fulfilling these conditions beforehand. But this practice of righteousness does not constitute the Kingdom, is not itself the Kingdom, any more than it brings in the Kingdom. For to our Lord the coming of the Kingdom of God was no metaphor of social progress, no metaphor of anything at all, but reality—the sternest reality in the world, albeit the dearest; the reality which he called upon men to face, with utterly consuming fire of conviction, and to bring which he finally laid down his life.

This new righteousness, which was not the Kingdom itself, but the indispensable condition to one's entering it, was the central subject of his public teaching. It was the teaching which naturally accompanied his announcement of the immediate coming of the Kingdom and his call to repentance. He came as the herald and prophet of the Kingdom, in his first appearance as a public teacher, proclaiming its nearness, and calling men to repentance before it. "The Kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe." It was the Kingdom as related to righteousness, and righteousness as related to the Kingdom, with which he was first concerned, with which he would have his hearers first concerned. His "ethics" and his "theology" were homocentric and inseparable. When he undertook to deepen and to transform the Law of his time, it was not as a reformer of legislation, but as the prophet of the Kingdom of God: "I say unto you, that except your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, ye shall in no wise enter into the Kingdom of heaven."¹ Yet the Kingdom was never identical with the fulfilment of all required righteousness; the fulfilment of all righteousness, and righteousness as he expounded it, was only the passport into the Kingdom.

¹ Matt. 5:20.

CHAPTER II

THE NEW RIGHTEOUSNESS: THE CHARACTER REQUISITE IN THOSE WHO ENTER THE KINGDOM

Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the Kingdom of heaven.

—Matt. 5:3.

We have seen the great dividing line between Jesus' thought and the thought of the majority of the nation: the Kingdom was too great a good adequately to be represented as the satisfaction of the nationalist-political aspirations of the people, however religiously these aspirations might be conceived or colored. It was as a nation that the Jews hoped for the coming of the Kingdom, and as a nation that they expected to enjoy its blessings. God was peculiarly their God, and he had bound himself by the promises made to the Fathers. But our Lord did not share this hope of national blessedness. He discovered in his own reception, and rejection, the unfitness of the nation to receive the Kingdom. It was a generation "evil and faithless," sign-seeking, unrepentant, unresponsive to the appeal of the true righteousness. The atmosphere of the time was like that of a sultry August afternoon, heavy and charged with storm, with such lightning and thunder as broke loose in the tempest of 66 to 70 A.D., and only subsided when the beautiful city of Jerusalem with its temple and palaces lay in ruins. It was such a generation as could least, of all generations, have produced Jesus of Nazareth, into which his coming must continue one of the great miracles of history. The glaring fault of the times was the common assumption that men had done their part, in keeping the Law, but that God was delinquent in doing his part, establishing the Kingdom, freeing his people from alien domination, and permitting them to "inherit the earth." Compared to the treatment of other provinces, the Roman rule in Palestine was just and equitable; but to the Jew of Palestine any foreign jurisdiction was in itself an unbearable burden. The nation, though impotent and helpless, was restless and impatient, like a man wasted with slow-burning fever. It was a generation which had not come to

itself, without purpose and without unity, except the unity of sullen hatred, and resentment of supposed oppression. Our Lord compared it to a group of peevish, fretful children in the markets, called upon to join in play and refusing to respond.¹ Alike it had rejected the Baptist in the wilderness and the Son of Man sitting at meat. "Therefore, the Kingdom shall be taken away from you, and shall be given to a nation bringing forth the fruits thereof."² There were to be no Jewish privileges in the Kingdom. Such privileges had been forfeited. The nation had failed to bring forth the fruits of repentance and righteousness; the nation had rejected the Son of Man and his gospel, and in rejecting the Son of Man and the gospel it had rejected the Kingdom. Therefore it could not, as a nation, inherit the Kingdom.

For God's Kingdom is "for them for whom it hath been prepared."³ And who are they? The current Jewish answer was, the elect, that is, those who are known to God and chosen by him in all the corners of the earth. Ordinarily, this meant the dispersed Jews, scattered among the nations of the Gentiles. When the Messiah comes in glory, so some said, he shall gather his elect from all the four corners under heaven;⁴ these have been "given to him";⁵ their names are "written in heaven";⁶ they have been "called from of old," foreknown, God's chosen and elect ones. With very few exceptions (for example, Enoch) the elect were all Jews. This doctrine of election was only the conclusion drawn, with very unstable premises, no doubt, under the overpowering sense of the felicity which God had in store for those who should inherit the Kingdom. Its blessings seemed too precious to have been laid up without regard to those who should enjoy them. The greatest happiness one could hope to enjoy was to be alive when the Kingdom came, when the Messiah should either as an earthly savior raise an army and fight victoriously for the freedom of the nation, or as the heavenly Son of Man come in glory on the clouds to judge the world, save and avenge the

¹ Matt. 11:16.

³ Mark 10:40.

² Matt. 21:43.

⁴ Cf. Matt. 24:31.

⁵ Note the use of this expression in John 10:28 f.; 17:6, 12.

⁶ Luke 10:20; and cf. Phil. 4:3; Heb. 12:23; Rev. 3:5; 13:8; 22:19; etc.

Jewish nation, and inaugurate the everlasting reign of God. The next-best felicity he could hope to enjoy was to be of the elect, and so a sharer in the resurrection, to be raised from the dead to enjoy the Kingdom. All the rest of the world should be for slaughter and destruction, cast into the winepress of the wrath of God, with blood running up to the horses' bridles.¹ Such an expectation, based upon the sense of national privilege, was utterly selfish, and miserable. Upon such evil days as these had fallen that noble Jewish hope which can be traced in the Prophets and Psalter. It had gone to seed, and its decay had set in. It now represented simply the survival of that old political-religious superstition of the masses (which was rooted in ancient oriental folk-myth), tinged with some of the glamor of a spiritual apocalyptic, set in transcendent terms, and with a supernatural instead of a social background. It had been the folly of the nation in the days of Amos and Isaiah, when men appealed to "the Day of Jehovah," and the prophets had warned, "Woe to you that desire the Day of Jehovah! It is darkness and not light."² It was the same incurable superstition which had held that the temple of Jehovah, the holy city, the sacred land, were inviolate, and that the covenant with Jehovah rendered them safe from all attack. It was so in the days of Sennacherib's invasion; it was so in the days of our Lord; and none of the almost annihilating disasters which had overtaken the nation had been sufficient to shake this misguided faith.

Against this tendency toward self-delusion our Lord firmly set himself. The Kingdom was too great a good for mere nationality to entitle anyone to its privileges, even had the nation as a whole been worthy. God was too great. "Your Father in heaven . . . maketh his rain to fall and his sun to shine on the just and on the unjust," on the lands of heathen nations, as on the soil of Palestine.³ Mere descent from Abraham gave no one a right to the Kingdom's blessings. As John had said, "God is able of these *stones* to raise up children unto Abraham," if he wished merely to multiply the seed of Abraham.⁴ Such an uncom-

¹ Rev. 14:17-20; cf. Enoch 100:3; IV Ezra 15:35.

² Amos 5:18.

³ Matt. 5:45.

⁴ Matt. 3:9.

promising attitude to the national traditions and aspirations was met with bitter opposition, suspicion, and hatred. It accounts for the fickleness of the multitudes which followed him at first; they wanted no prophet who was a heretic on this point, and who offered them no particular advantages over their heathen neighbors in the coming era; and it accounts for the conspiracy which brought about his death. The Kingdom, as the coming reign of God foretold in the Prophets, was not to be a rule of racial privilege. The great single demand, before entrance into it could be granted, was actual, active righteousness; not the righteousness of the Law, as the Law was commonly understood and kept, but the righteousness which is from within, from the whole heart; that righteousness which is the result of the working out of a man's real highest self, turned toward God in repentance and in faith.

As we have observed, Jesus did not encourage speculation regarding the nature of the coming reign of God, the sort of speculation which was most rife in his time, and which had resulted in the wonderful variety of views then prevalent. Whether it was to be a Kingdom, as earthly monarchs ruled over kingdoms, or whether it was to be a wholly spiritual dominion, with every thought and motive in subjection to the divine will, he did not say. At times he spoke in the terms of current figure: "The Kingdom shall come with power";¹ "the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory,"² or "in the glory of his Father with the holy angels."³ At other times he discarded this popular speculation or treated it as mere figure and poetic fancy: "The Kingdom of God cometh not with observation; neither shall they say, Lo, here! or, Lo, there! for lo, the Kingdom of God is in the midst of you."⁴ He never announced precisely what he conceived the form of the Kingdom to be. Rather, that, as well as the time of the coming of the Kingdom, "no man knoweth; not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father."⁵ "It is not for you to know . . . that . . . which the Father hath set within His own authority."⁶ His own mission, so Jesus

¹ Mark 9:1.

² Matt. 24:30.

³ Mark 8:38.

⁴ Luke 17:20 f.

⁵ Mark 13:32.

⁶ Acts 1:7.

conceived it, was to announce the Kingdom's near approach, and "to call sinners to repentance," to call the whole sinful people to prepare for the great Day of the Lord. From the very beginning it was a prophetic mission; that its actual dénouement did not end with prophecy we shall see. It was the nation's duty to repent and be in readiness; as he told the disciples, to "watch." "Watch ye therefore, for ye know not when the Master of the house cometh, at even, or at midnight, or at cock-crowing, or in the morning; lest coming suddenly he find you sleeping. And what I say unto you I say unto all, Watch."¹

The essence of the Kingdom was to be: *God's Rule established in the world*. This could be viewed, under the symbolism supplied by the current expectations, as an endless day of prosperity, joy, and peace; or it could be thought of as purely the ascendancy of the divine righteousness in the hearts of men: "the Kingdom is within you, in your midst." However, this ascendancy of the divine righteousness is not by any means the dear utopia of some ethical philosopher. One has only to refer to the parable of the Last Judgment² or to the interpretation of the Law given in the Sermon on the Mount to see how completely our Lord's ethics were eschatologically conditioned. He did not teach ethics as ethics, but as the righteousness which is the condition of entering the Kingdom of God. And the Kingdom, as we have said, was never a purely ethical quantity; ethics could no more supply its true content and substance than could the popular eudaemonism of the national hope. But, under whatever symbolism or imagery of the mind it was considered, this essence of the Kingdom, as the coming *reign of God*, was nowhere lost sight of by our Lord; it was the constant and determining thing in all his teaching. The Kingdom, whatever its nature, whenever the time of its coming, could be no less than God's absolute rule set up in the world. In view of the greatness of this fact, and of its imminence of realization, the precise time, the exact form of its outward appearance, were in truth relatively nonessentials. It was to be God's Kingdom; its nature, therefore, must be appropriate to, and befitting the nature and the character of, God. The difference between

¹ Mark 13:35 ff.

² Matt. 25:31-46.

Jesus' conception of the Kingdom and the conceptions of his contemporaries was rooted in the difference between his conception of God and theirs. It is his conception of the character of God which determines his conception of what the rule of God shall be. His reign will be like himself. His Kingdom, which is one of harmony and unity, must be like its King; its subjects and its Monarch live by the same Law. And if it be asked, What was Jesus' conception of God? it can be summed up in one word—a word frequently upon his lips, in public and in private, in discourse and in secret prayer—*Father*.

The coming reign of God is to be the reign of the loving Father. It is to be a paternal rule, a domestic reign, the supervision of "the household of God," "the whole family in heaven and earth," by God the loving Father. God is righteous, therefore none but the righteous can enter the Kingdom. God is loving, therefore the unloving are to be excluded. God is holy, therefore the impure have no place in the Kingdom. God is unselfish, therefore the selfish, the self-centered, the self-righteous, cannot enter into a kingdom which means a close personal relationship to that holy and loving Father who is its King. But the humble, the pure in heart, the peacemakers, the meek, and souls filled with a selfless charity, the mourners, and the persecuted, they that hunger and thirst after righteousness and are never filled or satisfied—these shall inherit the Kingdom prepared for them from the foundation of the world. For they are worthy. Whatever good deeds they have done have in reality been done, all unwittingly, to their heavenly King. Poor upon earth, lacking in that which most of the world calls good and valuable and worth effort to acquire, they are rich in the treasure of heaven; their reward is stored up for them, and in the Kingdom they shall have it to enjoy. "Blessed are the pure in heart"—not the ceremonially cleansed, but the intrinsically pure and clean—"for they shall see God." As the character of the Kingdom is dependent upon the character of the King, so the character which is to be required of those who enter the Kingdom is one of likeness to the King. "Ye therefore shall be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect."¹ The passport into

¹ Matt. 5:48.

the Kingdom, for those who seek to enter, the test of righteousness, is simply doing the Father's will.¹ And doing the Father's will perfectly means the acquisition of the Father's character, growth in the divine likeness. "If you would enter into life (i.e., the Kingdom), keep the commandments," fulfil God's demand for righteousness.²

The righteousness of the Kingdom, the righteousness which is preparatory to the coming of the Kingdom, which fits men for entrance into the Kingdom, and is the true and required response to the message of its coming, is inward and not legal, moral and not ceremonial. This keen distinction (and we can hardly exaggerate its keenness in contrast to the legalistic thinking of his generation), stated in such terms as Jesus used, was both scandal and heresy to the majority of the Pharisees. They "tithed mint and rue and every common herb," extending the Law till it embraced almost numberless *minutiae*, details which practically no one could observe without considerable leisure and close application; while they "neglected the weightier matters of the Law, justice and mercy and the love of God."³ But our Lord made, what had been the true tenor of the ancient Law as he expounded it, rightness of heart the essential thing. This too was dependent upon his conception of God, not as the distant Monarch, the exacting Lawgiver and Judge, but as the intimate, loving Father.

Since the Kingdom is the reign of such a King, its privileges are not limited to one particular nation, or social or economic class, but are universal, dependent only upon the *sine qua non* of righteousness and faith (or receptivity). "Many shall come from the east and the west" to enjoy the blessings of the Kingdom.⁴ This was scandalous in the eyes of strict Pharisees, the popular leaders in piety—scandalous for any Jew, monstrous for one who (as they assumed)

¹ Matt. 7:21.

² Luke 10:25 ff.; 18:18 ff.

³ Luke 11:42; Matt. 23:23.

⁴ Matt. 8:11.

Some writers maintain that Jesus never contemplated extending the privileges of the Kingdom to non-Jews, and appeal to such passages as Matt. 10:23; 16:28; but it must not be forgotten that this same Gospel, Matthew, contains also the passage just referred to above, 8:11, and the great climax, 28:18-20.

claimed to be a prophet of God. "Lo, he receiveth sinners!"¹ And this "universalism" of his gospel came from no genial spirit of democracy possessing his heart, but from a source profounder, the source of what is in the end the very noblest democracy: his conception of God, the Father, who is loving to all his children. "The Lord is loving unto every man, and His mercy is over all His works."² In this sense the coming of the Kingdom is individual and not national (or social). It is God's reign, to which individuals prepared therefor can submit themselves and which they can enjoy. God's reign is certainly soon to be set up, its coming is inevitable. And, since human society is hopelessly on the down grade, men can save themselves, at great cost, by renouncing the present world, and by fitting themselves for the coming Kingdom, which is to supplant the world as it now is, the present order of human society in the world. It is practically the same appeal which we hear in the earliest apostolic preaching: "Save yourselves from this untoward generation."³ "The Kingdom of God is God's Dominion, certainly: but it is the dominion of the holy God in individual hearts, it is God Himself in His power."⁴ And yet the way in which individual men can be fit for the Kingdom, worthy to enter it in its full realization at the end of the "age," is by the practice of social virtues, love, mercy, kindness, justice, peace; social virtues as the outflow of an inner life turned toward God and in filial relation to him; social virtues, not for a social end, but for the sake of the Kingdom of Heaven.

Thus the Kingdom begins to exist upon earth already; the process of its establishment in this world has begun; it is apparent even now, set up in the hearts of those who have "received" it. This is evident in the parables of the Sower, the Mustard Seed, and Leaven. The first-fruits, though not its roots and its beginnings, are in individual lives. The thing is personal, in the heart. Whatever the Kingdom shall be, in outward glory (and he never consistently defines this), its criterion of values begins with the rightness of the single heart. The Messiah, whatever his coming

¹ Luke 15:2; Mark 2:16; Luke 7:39.

² Ps. 145:9, Prayer Book version.

³ Acts 2:40.

⁴ Harnack, *Wesen des Christentums*, p. 36.

in outward glory, will judge by the standard of personal relationships men's conduct toward their neighbors, which is counted as toward himself. "I was sick and in prison, and ye visited me; hungry, and ye fed me; naked, and ye clothed me. . . . Inasmuch as ye did it unto one of these my brethren, even the least, ye did it unto me."¹

Thus he vitalized the whole apocalyptic machinery, filled it full of life, gave to it a profounder meaning and interpretation than anyone else ever gave it, than anyone else at this time ever dreamed of giving it; a meaning which has been the guiding star and far-off beacon on the hills, nay, the very sun in the heavens, to all the generations since. All effort for righteousness, for justice, for mercy, has turned to his gospel for its guidance, its illumination, its inspiration; to the standard which he set, not for social reform, not as the goal of humanitarian meliorism and progress, but as the criterion of worthiness to enter the supernatural Kingdom of God; the standard which he taught should be the one test, when "the Son of Man shall come in his glory, and all the angels with him, and shall sit on the throne of his glory," when "before him shall be gathered all the nations, and he shall separate them one from another, as the shepherd separateth the sheep from the goats," at the impending messianic judgment, the approaching end of this world! A more perfect or more beautiful union of the social and the eschatological motives cannot be conceived than that which this parable affords.

Since God is the loving Father, then the test for membership in God's Kingdom is also that of proper personal relationship to Him. This must be one of faith, of trust, of humility, of dependence, which works out in human life into loving service to others. "He is greatest who serves."² This relationship to God and through him to others must be real and true and from the heart. "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the Kingdom of heaven. Blessed the meek, the merciful, the pure in heart, the peacemakers; blessed are they that hunger and thirst after righteousness," for theirs is the Kingdom, they shall see God, their longings shall be satisfied forever in fullest measure. But the self-sufficient, the worldly wise,

¹ Matt. 25:31 ff.

² Mark 9:35.

the impenitent, the uncharitable, simply have no place in the Kingdom.¹ It is not "prepared" for them. "Children, how hard is it to enter into the Kingdom of God!"² How hard for them that trust in riches, how hard, in simple fact, for them that *have* riches, and good things in this world!³ "Except ye turn and become as little children, ye shall in no wise enter into the Kingdom. Whosoever therefore shall humble himself as this little child, the same is greatest in the Kingdom of Heaven."⁴

It is difficult to enter the Kingdom. It cannot even be done by fulfilling the Law, as the scribes had interpreted it and the Pharisees put it in practice; and that was hard enough; how much less by easy drifting with the current of natural inclination. It is an absolute and awful, almost tragic, demand that Christ makes. The Kingdom must be the one supremely highest good of those who are to enter it; it must be their one aim and desire. Though the form of the coming Kingdom is not defined, our Lord makes it the one certain and unqualified good for human life. It is an absolute need which it satisfies, and is yet more fully to satisfy; and it satisfies this need absolutely, as nothing else can or ever conceivably could. It is as indispensable and necessary as life itself. And "what doth it profit a man to gain the whole world and forfeit his life?"⁵ In fact, entrance into the Kingdom is spoken of as entrance into "life";⁶ exclusion from the Kingdom means death—Gehenna, the fire and the worm, outer darkness and gnashing of teeth, as his contemporaries pictured it. It is to be a man's final and highest good: "The Kingdom of heaven is like unto a man that is a merchant seeking goodly pearls; and having found one pearl of great price, he went and sold all that he had, and bought it."⁷

The difficulty of entering the Kingdom does not arise from any unwillingness on God's part to give the Kingdom, or to receive men into it: "Fear not, little flock; it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the Kingdom."⁸ But the difficulty is on our side. We

¹ Matt. 5:3 ff.; Luke 6:24 ff.

² Mark 10:24.

³ Matt. 19:23 f.

⁴ Matt. 18:3 f.

⁵ Mark 8:36.

⁶ Cf. Mark 9:43-47.

⁷ Matt. 13:45 f.

⁸ Luke 12:32.

are so enmeshed and ensnared in "the cares of this world"¹ that the highest care, for the Kingdom, is so revolutionary a matter. But the Kingdom must be one's all, one's whole care. There can be no half-giving, no keeping back a part of the price, like Ananias and Sapphira. "No man, having put his hand to the plow, and looking back, is fit for the Kingdom of God."² It costs everything to enter the Kingdom. Nothing may be allowed to stand in the way, for the demands of the Kingdom are absolute: "Whosoever would save his life shall lose it. What doth it profit a man to gain the whole world, and forfeit his life? For what should a man give in exchange for his life?"³ "Whosoever he be . . . that renounceth not all that he hath, he cannot be my disciple."⁴ Surely, this at least is no modern gospel of social progress, but the gospel of complete self-sacrifice, of ascetical renunciation, of self-denial, of the crucifixion of the natural man and the desires of the flesh. "I came not to send peace, but a sword. . . . If any man cometh unto me, and hateth not his own father, and mother, and wife, and children, and brethren, and sisters, yea, and his own life also, he cannot be my disciple."⁵

We may grant that these words were addressed only to the band of immediate disciples, who had a special mission to fulfil and must therefore make special preparation for carrying it out; that for them discipleship must be carried out in a world un-Christian, lethargic and unresponsive, and even hostile, to the announcement of the message concerning the Kingdom and the true righteousness. We may grant that it is an oriental hyperbole which, translated into occidental forms of expression, means: A man must set the Kingdom higher than the family, relation to the Kingdom and to God above all human and domestic relationships, even the most sacred. But even so, with all these deductions, there still remains enough force in the words to make plain what an extreme demand is put upon those who seek the Kingdom. It must be their one and only object in life. In achieving this object no price is too high to pay. "If thine eye or thy foot offend thee,

¹ Mark 4:19.

³ Mark 8:35 ff.

² Luke 9:62.

⁴ Luke 14:33.

⁵ Luke 14:26; Matt. 10:34-39.

pluck it out or cast it off; it is better for thee to enter into life incomplete, blind or maimed, than having two eyes or two feet to be cast into outer darkness and death.”¹ “A safe life is better than a complete one.”²

This leads up to, and in a measure explains, his amazing announcement to his followers on that day when they were in the neighborhood of Caesarea Philippi, when they came to confess their faith in his messiahship. “The Son of Man, the divine Messiah, must suffer many things, and be rejected . . . and be killed. And ye, to be true to him, must share his dying life, must lay your own lives on the altar of sacrifice and renunciation.”³

It is common today, even outside the circle of Friedrich Nietzsche’s influence, to accuse the Christian saints of fanaticism—no new accusation at all, but noticeable enough. Men no longer, it is assumed, admire prodigious feats of self-denial. Asceticism is altogether out of vogue. And men dream of a dear utopia, soon to be realized, when the comforts and delicacies of life will be for all society; when “the natural man,” so degraded in the estimation of Christian theology, shall come into his own and by sheer force of his environment be carried on to glory. But in brushing aside as meaningless for today the asceticism of the saints, men brush aside something that Jesus of Nazareth made important and even essential.⁴

And what is this fanaticism, so unpopular today, which objectors urge against the gospel of Christ? What is it but the cold world’s name for exalted *faith*? Faith which sweeps away everything standing in the way? Faith which has lost touch with the realities upon which this world plants its feet so firmly, only to have them swallowed up in the greater realities of the spiritual, supersensual world? This stern, heroic earnestness, which holds something before men’s eyes saying, “Here is the one important thing in the world worth having,” it is this that lifts the veil off the face of things, that holds the key to unlock the closed gates of the Spirit, so that

¹ Matt. 5:29 f.; Mark 9:43 f.

² Bishop Gore, *The Sermon on the Mount*, *ad loc.*

³ Mark 8:27-38; Matt. 16:21-27.

⁴ Cf. Tyrrell, *Christianity at the Cross-roads*, p. 190.

the Spirit may enter and flood human life with his light and truth and power. This is the faith which overcometh the world; a faith which fixes, with deathly security and final grip, upon one thing of which it is utterly certain, and then bends all life to fit that one thing, casting away as impediments all things else of inferior and detracting value—all lower, all material and bodily and temporal interests. This is the faith which reaches down beneath the surface of life and discovers what is fundamental and real, that uncalculated power which at times has moved mankind more than all philosophy, sane reason, and bodily wants combined. This was the rare possession of those who have cast out demons,¹ removed mountains, raised the dead, and healed the sick, the dumb, and the afflicted among men. For having by this means earned their independence of Nature they stood in a position (of superearthly eminence) to command Nature—Nature, which either threatens or obeys, and can never ignore or be ignored. This was the possession of our Lord. “The highest, most intense feeling of existence, with an incomparable sense of power and capacity and no trace whatever of twilight or mortality, of dull, empty finiteness—that is Jesus’ conception of life and blessedness. No one can think in such fashion who does not himself possess the thing.”² This exalted faith, this “enthusiasm and intransigence in the cause of truth and justice,” is the very fulcrum of religion, by which its immense leverage on humanity is gained. That it is not in vogue today is not its condemnation; our prevailing religion is too soft and lax.

Comfort, in the sense of economic ease and the possession of this world’s good things, had no place in Christ’s gospel of the Kingdom. His consolation, as his power, was in the Cross, in the *via crucis* which led to life, in the obedience which was “to fulfil all righteousness” at whatever personal cost, in the death which was “for many.”³

The prospect of earthly comfort has never moved mankind to seek the highest ends. Nor has it by any means provided the sole, or even the greatest, motive in human history, in spite of the so-called “materialistic interpretation of history.”

¹ Mark 9:29.

² Holtzmann, *Neutestamentliche Theologie*, I, 222.

³ Mark 10:45.

It is not to taste sweet things, but to do noble and true things, and vindicate himself under heaven as a God-made man, that the poorest son of Adam dimly longs. . . . They wrong him greatly who say he is to be seduced by ease. Difficulty, abnegation, martyrdom, death—are the allurements that act on the heart of man. . . . Not by flattering our appetites; no, but by awakening the heroic that slumbers in every heart can any religion gain followers.¹

The most formidable enemy of the cross of Christ is the modern gospel of comfort—comfort, the substitute for culture and for religion, the idol and the ideal of our modern industrial civilization, the goal of all human striving. Christ promised no comforts, but exacted a man's all; promised hardship, rejection, tribulation, death, a cross. But the end was the Kingdom of God—eternal life.

¹ Carlyle, *Heroes and Hero-Worship*, Lect. II.

CHAPTER III

THE COMING OF THE KINGDOM

Thy Kingdom come.

—Matt. 6:10.

“The Kingdom of God, and his righteousness,” this is the highest good, the thing men are to seek first of all; whatever else they need will be “added unto them” by the Father who gives good gifts to his children.¹ The secret of life, that which gives to life its unity and strength, is to be found in concentration upon this one highest aim, and, correlatively, in sacrificing whatever lesser benefits block the way to its attainment.

This may, indeed, be termed “the ethics of heroism”; only the fact must not be overlooked that this ethics of heroism has a direct relation to the Kingdom which is to come. One’s entrance into the Kingdom is conditioned upon the exercise of that righteousness which is pleasing to the King. Nor must we forget the character outlined in the Beatitudes as the character of those who are to enter or to receive the Kingdom. Its privileges are for the pure in heart, the simple and single-minded, the humble, the poor in spirit, the whole-hearted seekers after righteousness, the trustful, the receptive, the obedient. To enter, one must turn and become as a little child. He must have the Law within, written on his heart; for the righteousness of the Kingdom is inward, a righteousness of motive, and not merely the satisfactory observance of an outward legal code. But also, one must not be unwilling to pay any cost, however great; for the Kingdom is worth more than anything in this world, even one’s life. Life, earthly happiness, the otherwise legitimate satisfactions of human desire, all may need to be let go; one must not hesitate at any sacrifice for the sake of entrance into the Kingdom. The Kingdom must be one’s absolute highest good, whole aim, completely satisfying and compensating gain.

Now the modern man is likely to think that this *is* the Kingdom; that this righteousness and this character were the whole subject

¹ Matt. 6:33; 7:11.

of our Lord's preaching; and that the Kingdom should come when this character became universal. When humanity should be thoroughly leavened by it, and society remolded to fit its standards, then it could be said that indeed God reigned. The idea of development, especially the development of human society, is an idea particularly germane to modern thought. And the modern man is likely to understand by "the coming of the Kingdom" the spread of this spirit in society and the consequent development of society to match this ideal.

But this was not at all our Lord's thought. The very conceptions, as the terms, of modern sociology and economics: "human society," "development," "social progress," were alien to his thought. They are modern. They suit an age of scientific attainments, a world of wider horizons than the Galilean and Judean hills. (No world is ever necessarily any *better* for having wide horizons.) Although we have used the term, Jesus nowhere speaks of "members" of the Kingdom. The Kingdom is not composed of units of men. It is not a human society; it is to include a human society, a body of transformed and perfected persons, but it does not stop with that. Its principals, its units, are two: God and the world (which of course includes men). Men may only enter it; they do not make it. The Kingdom is not a society made up of the virtuous, the righteous, the saved, etc. No aggregation of men, however great the aggregation, or however holy the men, can ever compose the Kingdom of God. It is a supernatural entity, and it comes as a gift to men; it is something not composed, created, or won by men, but it is given to men.

This seems to us no doubt a novel point of view. It certainly is not modern. But it is necessary that it be clearly and firmly grasped, if we wish to understand the New Testament. It is a point of view which can be understood in a historical way. It is explicable when we consider what the Greek word *Basileia* (or its Aramaic equivalent, *Malkuth*) meant in Palestine in the first Christian century. The meaning of the word had been given to it by what was at that time modern history. The great empires of the East had risen up and held sway over the world, the *Basileiai* or reigns of the powerful world-emperors. These were supposedly

divine in origin, brought about by either divine commission or permission. And the principals of these kingdoms, so far as the term "kingdom" went, were two—two only: the emperor, or "great king," and the peoples or nations of men; the ruler and the ruled. It was a vast idea which was thus represented, an idea which powerfully affected all human thought and survived for centuries, even down through the Middle Ages—a divine empire over the whole earth, with one king at its head; a supreme and absolute rule, in which individuals were negligible. Individuals were too numerous and too unimportant to be counted; men, myriad populations, whole swarming cities of human beings, were too cheap. The individual simply was not reckoned with or considered; he formed no part of the conception. The only individual who counted at all in this idea was the king.

This much *Basileia* meant, whether it was the *Basileia* of Cyrus, or of Caesar, or of God—a vast world-rule, a reign over the nations. (Of course the old, narrower conception lived on side by side with the new.) Men could enter a *Basileia*, could receive citizenship as a gift, or as a reward, or by purchase (as, for example, certain men were made citizens of Rome, under the Roman Empire). But no collection of individuals could compose a *Basileia*. The *Basileia* was the reign of the sovereign; it was there first, if we may be allowed to force upon the conception its logical connotations, as the great political framework. This was the political thought of ancient times and underlay the whole import of the word "kingdom." It was an utterly different idea from that which underlies most modern thought, in which, with the progress of democracy, the worth and significance of the individual has been more fully recognized, in which the individual has stepped into the spotlight and focus of attention. And this conception first entered Hebrew religious thought with the writing of the apocalyptic Book of Daniel.

It is a unique and wonderful peculiarity of our Lord's thought that he never lost sight of individuals in this grand scheme of history. On the one hand, individuals did not make up the Kingdom. No collection of individuals could make a kingdom; its essence is a reign. The Kingdom of God is not to be humanity, nor the

Jewish race, nor the elect, nor the followers of Christ. They all might only, as individuals, *enter* the Kingdom. Right here is the most notable fact: They might enter the Kingdom, and they might enter it only as individuals. "The Kingdom of God is at hand; repent, believe."¹ "I came . . . to call sinners to repentance."² "Go ye . . . to the lost sheep of the house of Israel."³ By teaching, example, exhortation, he endeavored to win his generation to the Kingdom, to persuade men to seize their opportunity, for they might enter the Kingdom. Then, his generation rejecting him, he turned from his own people to the world at large. "Go out into the highways and hedges."⁴ "The Son of Man came . . . to give his life a ransom for many."⁵ "The gospel must . . . be preached unto all the nations."⁶ "Other sheep I have which are not of this fold; them also I must bring."⁷

It is as individuals that men must enter the Kingdom. A man must stand on his own merits, as an individual person. In the Judgment it will be useless to plead, "We did eat and drink in thy presence, and thou didst teach in our streets; thou art a Jew, and we also be of Abraham's seed." For the Messiah will reply, "Depart from me, ye workers of iniquity; I know not whence ye are."⁸ "Strive to enter in by the narrow door; for many, I say unto you, shall seek to enter in and shall not be able."⁹ The condition to be fulfilled before entering this world-wide reign of God soon to be set up, the sole condition, but the absolute and indispensable condition, is actual, personal character, right-doing and uprightness before God.

It has surely by now become plain how great is the significance of those words at the beginning of Mark's narrative of the work of our Lord: "After the imprisonment of John, Jesus came into Galilee, preaching the gospel of God, and saying, The time is fulfilled, and the Kingdom of God is nigh at hand; repent and believe in the good-tidings."¹⁰ For months that was his gospel, the gist of his message in Galilee. All his teaching centered about this great

¹ Mark 1:15.

² Luke 5:32.

³ Matt. 10:6.

⁴ Luke 14:23.

⁵ Mark 10:45.

⁶ Mark 13:10.

⁷ John 10:16.

⁸ Luke 13:26 f.

⁹ Luke 13:24.

¹⁰ Mark 1:15.

announcement; all his work of calling disciples, casting out demons, healing the sick, pronouncing to individuals the forgiveness of their sins, preaching in parables to the multitudes—all had this in view. When he sent out his disciples to heal the sick, they were to bear a similar message.¹ When the crowds gathered about him, he taught them “the word,” that is, the message of the coming Kingdom.² For months, in synagogues and on hillsides, in the streets and houses of Capernaum, Bethsaida, Chorazin, in the little country villages and market places of Galilee; by parable and precept and by symbolic action, he taught the people and delivered this simple and prophetic message: that the Kingdom was soon to be set up. All men, in order to enter it when it comes, must believe the message and act upon it—repent. And this was the sum of his public message.

From whence did our Lord derive his certainty of the Kingdom’s coming? Without any doubt, for it is plain on the very surface of the Gospels, that certainty goes back at least to the preaching of John the Baptist and our Lord’s baptismal experience at the Jordan; and probably it goes back even farther still, though the Gospels leave us at a loss for any record (which is perfectly natural), to the conviction which led him to go down from Galilee to the wilderness of Judea and receive John’s baptism.

Men heard the first part of his message gladly. They rejoiced “that a great prophet had arisen” and “that God had visited his people.”³ His miracles of healing attracted thousands from all quarters of the land—from Galilee and Judea, from Decapolis and Perea and the country beyond the Jordan.⁴ Men came from every part of the country to hear him, bringing their sick to be healed. His fame “spread abroad.” So great was his popularity and so ceaselessly was he attended by the multitudes that he had little rest and at times no opportunity even to eat.⁵ For rest he had to withdraw into deserted places in the country. He was in constant demand. So upsetting was all this to the routine religious life of the people that the Pharisees sent down a committee from Jerusalem to investigate his work.⁶ The climax of this popularity was

¹ Mark 6: 7-13; Matt. 10: 5-15.

³ Luke 7: 16.

⁵ Mark 6: 31.

² Mark 2: 2, etc.

⁴ Matt. 4: 25, etc.

⁶ Mark 7: 1; Matt. 15: 1.

reached when a great multitude numbering about five thousand men, besides women and children, met him in the country east of Lake Galilee, whither they had come by going around the lake when he crossed it to evade them, and attempted to make him their "king."¹ He was the hero, the lion of the hour, the man whose name was on every tongue.

It was about this time, or during this period of popularity, that he spoke so hopefully of the coming of the Kingdom. His word was apparently producing its effect, despite the misunderstanding of the followers who would willingly have placed themselves in his hands as subjects or as soldiers of a revolutionary army. He could see its results growing daily before his eyes. "And he said, So is the Kingdom of God (i.e., the response to the message of its coming) as if a man should cast seed upon the earth; and should sleep and rise night and day, and the seed should spring up and grow, he knoweth not how."² Or "it is like a grain of mustard seed which, when it is sown upon the earth, though it be the smallest of seeds, yet, when it grows up, becomes greater than all herbs, and puts forth great branches—so that the birds of heaven can lodge under its shadow."³ Or "it is like leaven which a woman took and hid in three measures of meal, till all was leavened."⁴ The wonder of the response! The Kingdom is coming, and men are preparing for it. The good word of the Kingdom is spread abroad, scattered like seed, and springing up for the harvest! Over this he rejoiced.

Yet even now he could not fail to perceive, what later he plainly saw, how superficial was the response. No doubt it crept like an evil suspicion into the very heart of his joy over the widespread interest in his message and fell like a deepening shadow across his path. The nation as a whole was not turning toward righteousness. And the great multitudes who came to him from every quarter came mostly for healing of their physical diseases, or to satisfy their curiosity, "to see signs and wonders." The scribes and the Pharisees were becoming hostile, and were circulating calumnies, saying, "He casteth out demons by Beelzebub, the prince of demons";⁵ and men listened to them as well as to him. The mass of men were

¹ John 6: 1-15.

³ Mark 4: 31 f.

² Mark 4: 26 f.

⁴ Matt. 13: 33.

⁵ Matt. 12: 24.

unrepentant, unreflective, unresponsive to the moral point of his announcement, the call to faith and repentance. His popularity had no large solid backing. He was not the champion of a common cause, but the prophet of a new. His task was twofold: first, to arouse and sustain enthusiasm; secondly, to turn this enthusiasm into higher channels than mere Zealotism. He had to center men's attentions upon the popularly anticipated Kingdom, and then to hold them there while he exchanged the commonly conceived idea of the Kingdom for something higher—something moral and spiritual and non-political. Accordingly, he must somehow have been prepared for (if not, then tragically disillusioned by) the crude undiscerning enthusiasm of the mob "who would have taken him by force and made him king."

We see his own discerning judgment upon the reception of his message and upon the shallow enthusiasm of the great majority, in the parable of the Sower.¹ Himself the sower, he likened his hearers to the rocky, shallow, sunburned soil upon which the farmers of Galilee cast their seed in springtime. "Some falls by the wayside, and the birds devour it; some on the rocky, cloddy ground, and the sun soon burns the tender sprouts; some among the thorns, where it is choked; only a part falls on the good, rich earth, where it springs up, matures, and yields its fruit, thirty-, sixty-, or an hundred-fold."

His first rejoicing over the wide and enthusiastic response of his fellow-men to the message of the Kingdom gives place to sorrow over their hardness and blindness of heart. He compares his reception to that of the prophet Isaiah. The people are still blind, and their hearts still heavy:

Seeing, they do not see;
Hearing, they do not understand;
—Lest they should turn,
And I should heal them.²

Accordingly, his expectation of the immediate coming of the Kingdom gives fuller place to the conviction that "the day and the hour knoweth no man,"³ though he did not give up his confidence in the

¹ Mark 4:1-20.

² Matt. 13:13 ff.

³ Mark 13:32.

coming of the Kingdom within a generation. "Verily, I say unto you, that there are some standing here who shall not taste of death before they see the Kingdom of God come with power."¹ This confidence was never lost. To the high priest at his trial he said, "Henceforth ye shall see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of power and coming on the clouds of heaven": coming to judge the nations and to establish, with power, the Kingdom of God.² At the Last Supper he said to his disciples, "I shall no more drink of the fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new in the Kingdom of God."³ No one could say just when the Kingdom was to come; neither the angels, nor the Son, but only the Father knew. Yet he was sure of its coming within a few years at the farthest. Its near approach was an inevitable fact. It was inevitable for the simple reason that God was bringing it about. The coming of His Kingdom was not dependent upon human acceptance of the divine message. It was solely within the power of God. Men's acceptance or rejection of the message affected only their own individual status when the Kingdom came.

The reason why the majority of the nation rejected our Lord is that they were unable to change their habits of thought and of life. They had a stereotyped conception of the Kingdom, and of the manner of the Kingdom's coming, and of the privileges which they themselves were to enjoy in it; and they could not alter or enlarge this idea sufficiently to accept our Lord's new doctrine. It was just as impossible to accept that doctrine without changing habits of life and of thought, without "repentance," as it was impossible to keep fresh wine in old, dried wine skins.⁴ Fresh, new skins will give and stretch as the wine ferments; the old ones merely burst. So with the old, dried-up, and bigoted notions of the majority in the nation. They could conceive that the Kingdom was coming, that it was, in fact, at hand; they could respond to this part of Jesus' message, because it left undisturbed their preconceived ideas. They were already expecting the Kingdom; its coming was the object of the greatest longing of their hearts. But they could not conceive that the test for entrance into it should be

¹ Mark 9:1; and cf. Luke 21:31-33.

³ Mark 14:25; cf. Matt. 26:29.

² Matt. 26:64.

⁴ Mark 2:22.

the sort of righteousness which Jesus taught. Their idea was that the Kingdom should be for Jews only, and for those Jews who kept the Law faithfully in all its details; who observed frequent ceremonies of washing, who fasted often and gave alms, who made long prayers, and wore long tassels on their robes. All these customs were commanded either by the old Law itself or by the Law as supplemented with Rabbinic comments and the precepts of "the elders."¹ These famous teachers had erected what they called a "fence about the Law," hedging it in securely upon the principle that by far exceeding the real demands of the Law they made sure its complete fulfilment.² All this being zealously observed, the Kingdom would surely come, and the faithful observers of the Law should enter into their eternal reward and rest. Indeed, it was the teaching of at least one great Pharisaic teacher that "the redemption through the Messiah" should come only when "all Israel repents and observes the Law perfectly from one Sabbath to the next."³ What a light these words throw upon the religious life of that day! It was this which made our Lord so unacceptable to the majority of his generation—his uncompromising assertion of the new righteousness as the requisite credential, to be demanded by God, for entrance into the Kingdom, in the face of their preconceived notions. They followed him a part of the way; then, like some of the first disciples, they "turned aside and walked no more with him."⁴ It was their idea that the Kingdom could be won; it was his idea that the Kingdom could be received only as God's gracious gift and entered into only by God's true children; and the fulfilment of this sonship was a greater matter than obedience to a written Law or a code of tradition or the observance of a system of ceremonies.

Their speedy response, at first, to the message of John the Baptist and to his own message had led to a great crush and turmoil of anxiety. "The Law and the prophets were until John; but from the days of John the Baptist until now the Kingdom of God is preached, and the Kingdom suffers violence, and the violent

¹ Mark 7:1-8.

² Cf. the Mishna tractate Aboth, i, 1.

³ Schürer, *Geschichte des Jüdischen Volkes*, II⁴, p. 620.

⁴ John 6:66.

attempt to take it by force, crowding their way into it.”¹ Such was the popular response. Men expected to hear the cry, “Lo, here,” or “Lo, there,” that the Messiah had come, and with him the Kingdom; and they were ready to flock into it. But our Lord refused to have part in such expectations or to lend them an all too gladly seized encouragement. The violent simply could not seize the Kingdom, nor enter therein. Their assault would be ineffectual. God’s Kingdom may suffer this storm, but will not yield to such methods. The Kingdom can be neither won nor seized. It can only be accepted, received as a gift, entered humbly and in fear. Pride based upon the successful fulfilment of the letter of the Law has no place in it, nor in the preparation for its coming. “Fear not, little flock, it is your Father’s good pleasure to give you the Kingdom.”² “Whosoever will not receive the Kingdom of God as a little child shall by no means enter therein.”³

One reason for Jesus’ continued confidence in the Kingdom’s immediate coming, in spite of the nation’s unrepentance, was his interpretation of “the signs of the times.”⁴ That is, the Kingdom was coming, inevitably, because God was to set it up; and God was already vouchsafing the fulfilment of the signs which he had revealed should precede the end. It was a matter of common belief, based upon the Old Testament prophets, that there were to be certain “signs”⁵ of the coming of the Kingdom.

1. The first of these signs was to be a series of supernatural manifestations. As long before as the time of Joel the prophet, these expressions of divine might were anticipated.

And it shall come to pass afterward that I will pour out my spirit upon all flesh; and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your old men shall dream dreams, your young men shall see visions. And also upon the servants and upon the handmaids in those days will I pour out my spirit (even slaves should turn prophets and seers). And I will show wonders in the heavens and in the earth: blood and fire and pillars of smoke. The sun shall be turned into darkness, and the moon to blood, before the great and terrible day of Jehovah cometh. And it shall come to pass that whosoever calleth upon the name of

¹ Matt. 11:13, 12; the order of Luke 16:16 is preferable to that of Matthew.

² Luke 12:32.

⁴ Matt. 16:3.

³ Mark 10:15.

⁵ Cf. Mark 13:4.

Jehovah shall be delivered; for in Mount Zion and in Jerusalem shall be those that escape, as Jehovah hath said, and among the remnant whom the Lord doth call.¹

2. The second "sign of the end" and indication of Messiah's near approach, it was expected, was to be the coming of Elijah. This we see at the end of the Book of Malachi: "Behold, I send you Elijah the prophet before the great and terrible Day of Jehovah come. And he shall turn the heart of the fathers to the children, and the heart of the children to the fathers."²

3. Lastly, they were looking for great upheavals in society and among nations. "Ye shall hear of wars and rumors of wars. . . . Nation shall rise up against nation."³ "Gog and Magog" and all distant tribes shall lift up the sword.⁴ The holy city and the holy people were to suffer in this great time of blood. These occurrences, the last throes of a world bent on carnage and destruction, were to be the immediate prelude of Messiah's coming, and hence were called *dolores Messiae*, the birth pangs of the Messiah.⁵

Our Lord pointed to the partial fulfilment of all these signs in his own time. First, the pouring out of God's spirit, prophesied in the first half of the quotation from Joel just given: he saw this in his own miraculous works. To the messengers of John the Baptist, asking if he is really the Messiah, he replies, "Go tell John the things ye see and hear: the blind receive their sight, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the poor have good-tidings preached to them."⁶ He lets John then judge for himself if this be not "the pouring out of God's spirit on all flesh." In the synagogue of Nazareth he reads the prophetic message beginning, "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me . . . "; and adds, "Today hath this scripture been fulfilled in your ears."⁷ To the carping malicious Pharisees, who ascribe his miracles to diabolical possession, he says, "If I by the Spirit of God cast out

¹ Joel 2: 28 ff.

³ Mark 13: 7 f.

² Mal. 4: 5.

⁴ Ezek. 38: 2; cf. Rev. 20: 8 ff.

⁵ See Bousset, *Religion des Judentums*², chaps. xii, xiii; Volz, *Jüdische Eschatologie*, pp. 173-88; Schürer, *Geschichte des Jüdischen Volkes*, II⁴, 621-25; and the references given in Charles, *Eschatology: Hebrew, Jewish, and Christian*², p. 382, note.

⁶ Matt. 11: 4.

⁷ Luke 4: 16-20.

demons, then is the Kingdom of God come upon you.”¹ He points to his miracles as signifying the approach of the Kingdom; the only appeal he ever makes to them.² They were not mere “signs and wonders” (σημεῖα καὶ τέρατα), but “mighty works” (δυνάμεις), certain and powerful indications of the approaching full unveiling of God’s supernatural Kingdom, the full and perfect manifestation of his divine power. They were of the nature of symptoms showing the change taking place in the world, by which God was to “take His great power and reign.” They were in very truth “the powers of the age to come.”³

In the same way he pointed out that the prophecy of Elijah’s coming, to precede the Messiah, was already fulfilled. He identified Elias with John the Baptist. “If ye are willing to receive it, this is Elijah that is to come.”⁴

The other great sign of the nearness of the Kingdom, and precursory to its coming, the convulsions in nature and in human society predicted in the second half of our quotation from Joel’s “apocalypse,” was yet to take place. At that time the righteous were to suffer. In fact, in these messianic woes the chief sufferers were to be the righteous.

The records of the discourse of our Lord on the destruction of Jerusalem and the signs of the approaching end when read in the Gospels⁵ present a stumbling-block oftentimes to modern Christians. This is not strange; for the ideas underlying the discourse are wholly incongruous to modern thinking. According to these ideas, the end of the present age, when the Kingdom of God was to be established, was at hand. Men stood at the very end of time. Any day might be the last. “With the same certainty with which we should expect the regular change of the seasons, these men (Jesus and the Baptist) believed that the Day of the Lord was at hand.”⁶ We can hardly overstress the importance of this sense of the approaching end in our Lord’s and in the Apostolic preaching;

¹ Matt. 12:28.

² It may be noted that this was true of the attitude to our Lord’s miracles in the apostolic age as well.

³ Heb. 6:5. ⁴ Matt. 11:14; Mark 9:13. ⁵ Matt. 24; Mark 13; Luke 21.

⁶ Johannes Weiss, *Die Predigt Jesu vom Reiche Gottes*, p. 68.

not a single phase of life or of thought could remain unaffected by it; like a flood of colored light it streamed upon all the familiar objects of daily life, transforming them strangely and wonderfully. Before the end should come, near as it was, terrifying disturbances in nature and among men were to take place. The world should go down amid tumult and shouting. The trumpet of the Judgment should peal forth across a lurid sky and above an earth in agonies of social and physical distortion. The righteous should scarcely be saved in the general destruction.¹ They should suffer as never before; but their age-long cry for vengeance would be heard. The ancient prayer would be answered, "How long, O Lord, how long dost thou not avenge our blood upon the ungodly?"²

He felt that all this was coming speedily, as the divine vengeance upon the world for the sins of men and the consequent sufferings of God's saints. "The blood of all the prophets, which was shed from the foundation of the world, shall be required of this generation. From the blood of Abel unto the blood of Zachariah, who perished between the altar and the sanctuary; yea, I say unto you, it shall be required of this generation!"³ "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, that killest the prophets, and stonest them that are sent unto thee. . . . Behold, your house is left unto you desolate."⁴

And therefore our Lord goes to his own death, nay, invites suffering and death, yearns for it,⁵ and presents the prospect of death to his disciples as their reward for following him. "The Son of Man goeth as it is written of him."⁶ The death of the Son of Man is to be the last, the final provocation of God's vengeance. And his death is to be for many;⁷ it will bring in the Kingdom of God; and by his sacrificial, vicarious death he will present to God the perfect sacrifice of the New Covenant.⁸ "This is my blood of the New Covenant which is poured out for many unto remission of sins."⁹

This, however much of theology it may involve, is the only answer which history can give to the question, Why did Jesus die?

¹ Mark 13:19 f.

⁵ Luke 12:49 f.; 22:15 f.

² Rev. 6:10; Ps. 79:5, 10.

⁶ Mark 14:21.

³ Luke 11:50 ff.; cf. Matt. 23:35 f.

⁷ Mark 10:45; 14:24.

⁴ Matt. 23:37 f.

⁸ Mark 14:24.

⁹ Matt. 26:28.

CHAPTER IV

THE KINGDOM AND THE MESSIAH

Who say ye that I am?

—Mark 8:29.

We now come to that aspect of our Lord's teaching concerning the Kingdom of God which most completely separates him from the ethical thought of our time. The question which we here set ourselves to answer is, What was the Messiah's relation to the Kingdom? What was his part and place in it?

The modern world exalts Jesus as a teacher; as the one who foreshadowed and pointed out, in oracular and touching words, the whole development of civilized humanity, who marked out the lines of future ethical advance; who opened up, in men's hearts, the way into the realm of the Spirit—the path, which is righteousness, leading to the true adjustment of social relationships, the sovereignty of true motives among men, the conquest of the world in the name of justice, mercy, and peace. In this popular modern conception of the Kingdom of God the Messiah simply has no place. His name is only an outworn title of Jewish theology, and is hence to be discarded. At most, the notion of a Messiah was only a temporary and a passing one, which faded away with the final collapse of apocalyptic hopes. And Jesus' so-called "messianic claims" were not essential to his gospel. Or else it was a title given him out of grateful love, an office ascribed to him by the devout imagination of his disciples, after his death. But, we say, it is right in this particular that our modern, liberal, "ethical" Christianity is farthest from the thought of Jesus *himself*.

In the first place, it is undoubtedly true that the Kingdom was conceivable apart from the Messiah. It has even been said that "if no other sources were accessible to us than those of Jewish apocalyptic [i.e., if we did not have the New Testament], one might come to the conclusion that the figure of the Messiah had practically disappeared from the hope of late Judaism."¹ This may be

¹ Bousset, *Religion des Judentums im neutestamentlichen Zeitalter*², p. 255.

accounted for by the enlargement of the Jewish notion of the world, in which the expectation of a king of the line of David becomes totally overshadowed, and by the widespread feeling, in the time of the Maccabees, that in this princely family the ancient hopes and prophecies were being literally realized. But with the fall of the Maccabean house their messianic nimbus was shattered, and they were viewed as usurpers. "And it is characteristic, that now in the very circle which passed this judgment upon them arose once more, full of life and energy, the old prophetic dream of a Messiah from David's line."¹

It is the revival of this hope which marks a new epoch in the thought of the Jewish people, at least within the circle of the apocalyptic enthusiasts (though we cannot, in view of the New Testament evidence, limit its influence to the bounds of this circle)—an epoch which included the preaching of John the Baptist and culminated in the teaching of our Lord. According to the doctrines which now sprang into life, the Messiah was to be the *head* of the Kingdom, and he was to *bring* the Kingdom. He was the one who under God or with God should arraign and judge all the nations. He was God's Anointed, his plenipotentiary and representative who should act for him; he was to be "the Arm of the Lord," "the Power of God," in the coming world-wide upheaval and reversal of affairs. He was to be clothed with glory and honor—a glory divine and Godlike, supernatural, transcendent, heavenly, above the glory of the angels—seated at God's right hand, and coming with the clouds; and with power so great that no earthly or heavenly power could resist him; whose very word, "the sword of his breath," "the rod of his mouth," should be all-powerful, entering intimately into "the dividing asunder of soul and spirit."² He should triumph over the nations, over all conspicuous and powerful sinners, the unrepentant in high places. He should conquer the invisible forces of wickedness in the universe, dominions, thrones, principalities, powers, the demons and spirits of evil, with Satan their prince, the ruler of the present world. Lastly, he should conquer death³ and raise the dead, the righteous unto life, the wicked to their damnation. So he should put all things under his feet and reign, thus

¹ *Ibid.*, p. 257.

² Cf. Heb. 4:12.

³ Cf. I Cor. 15:26.

triumphant in glory, for a thousand years—or forever—over the subdued and transformed world. This was to be the Kingdom of God. Its coming and establishment, if not its existence, was inconceivable apart from the Messiah. The Messiah has now become “almost universally the central and chief figure of the Messianic Kingdom.”¹ Indeed, the prayer of Judaism was henceforth not, “Thy Kingdom come,” but rather, “Thy Messiah come.” “Let the shoot of David, thy servant, spring forth, and exalt his horn with thy salvation; for in thy salvation do we hope all the day long. Blessed art thou, O Lord, who causest the horn of salvation to spring forth.”² Or, as we read in the forty-fifth chapter of the Book of Enoch, in a section of the book written early in the first century before Christ (probably during the time of Alexander Jannaeus, but certainly before Pompey’s arrival in Jerusalem in 63 B.C.):³

On that day mine Elect One will sit on the throne of glory and make choice amongst their [men’s] deeds, and their mansions will be numberless. Their spirit will grow strong within them when they see mine elect ones and those who have called upon my glorious name. And on that day I will cause mine Elect One to dwell among them; and I will transform the heaven and make it an eternal blessing and light. And I will transform the earth and make it a blessing and cause mine elect ones to dwell upon it; but those who commit sin and evil deeds will not set foot thereon.

It was the rôle of this prodigious, superhuman, world-transcending divine being that Jesus claimed as his own when he referred to himself as “the Son of Man.” It was with the consciousness that he was called to play this rôle and, more than merely to play a rôle, that he *was*, in very fact, the divine Son of Man that he returned from his baptism into Galilee in the summer of A.D. 27, announcing that the Kingdom of God was at hand and claiming, as Son of Man, the right to forgive sins and to set aside the customary restrictions placed upon the Sabbath.⁴ Of course, he did not announce his messiahship as openly and unambiguously as he

¹ Charles, *Eschatology: Hebrew, Jewish, and Christian*², p. 296; see the whole appendix, pp. 287–97.

² Shemoneh Esreh, fifteenth petition.

³ Ethiopic Enoch, 45:3–5; 46:1–5; 48:2–7; and cf. “Testaments of the XII Patriarchs,” Lev. 18; Matt. 13:41; 16:27; 19:28; 24:29 ff.; 26:64; Acts 7:56.

⁴ Mark 2:10, 28.

announced the coming of the Kingdom. Men had to be prepared for that. But he hinted at it; he led men on, by his veiled allusions to it, to ask for themselves, "Who, and what manner of man, is this?"¹ It was his secret, which he gradually opened, after a long course of preparation, to the disciples. It was his own personal secret; it was his private consciousness of his unique place with God and in the Kingdom which was thus expressed. There is reason to believe that "the Son of Man" was not so widely understood (outside the circle of the apocalyptists) in a strictly messianic sense as the phrase "Kingdom of God" was known and understood as a designation for the coming era. Thus it was possible to use the term ambiguously—and with full justice, for the primary meaning of the word was the popular, and the apocalyptic was an added sense. But before the eyes of the disciples he gradually unveiled the secret of his own character and destiny; and with that, the significance (for himself, at least) of his favorite self-designation, "the Son of Man." Henceforth they are to understand that by it he refers to himself; they were to share the secret. In the latter half of the synoptic narrative the disciples never misunderstand when he speaks of the Son of Man; they know whom he means.²

Publicly, and from the first, his office and mission is that of herald or prophet of the Kingdom. "Repent and believe, for the Kingdom of God is at hand," formed his message. "I came to call sinners."³ This was no higher function than that of John the Baptist; he was a preacher "in the way of righteousness."⁴ But gradually his miracles led men—a certain few, his most intimate circle of followers—to conclude that his true function was to be something higher; for "John did no sign."⁵ These few he gathers about him, to make them his assistants in the work of healing and "that they might be with him," as Mark records.⁶ For several months they were with him constantly, in public and in private, associated with him in his works among the people,⁷ and accompanying him on long tours into distant and desolate parts of the

¹ Cf. Mark 1:22; 2:12; 4:41; etc.

³ Mark 1:38; 2:17.

² Mark 8:31; 10:33.

⁴ Matt. 21:32.

⁵ John 10:41.

⁶ Mark 3:14.

⁷ Mark 3:15; 6:7, 13; 9:18, 38.

land. Here he was teaching them concerning himself and concerning the Kingdom, but especially that hardest of dogmas, "the Son of Man must suffer, and die."¹ This was a thought at first shocking, and then repulsive, and never intelligible. The Son of Man, the glorious being who was with God and from God, who had been with God from before creation's dawn—they could never understand that he must suffer.² It was true, Jesus claimed to be the Son of Man; and they believed, though they could hardly hope to explain it, that he was, indeed, such, the Messiah; but that Jesus, even were he not the Son of Man, must suffer and die, was a thought horrible and repulsive. They never understood it until after his death had actually occurred, until after the Resurrection, and they were commissioned to preach the forgiveness of sins in his name.³

This twofold disclosure—his messiahship and the sufferings of the Son of Man—had to be made slowly and in secret. Any immediate and public assertion of his claim would have resulted at once in his death—prematurely.

But that this was his claim, founded upon his own inner self-consciousness, and partaking of the same source of certainty from which he drew his message of the Kingdom, no skeptical criticism has been able successfully to deny. He claimed, on the strength of it, the right to forgive sins⁴—as "the Son of Man who hath righteousness."⁵ He made salvation, life in the Kingdom, entrance into the Kingdom, safety in the Day of Judgment, depend upon relation to himself: confessing his name, bearing the cross after him. No doubt this is primarily a practical and not a theological corollary to the doctrine of the new righteousness; it meant personal loyalty in days of terror and persecution. But it did not stop there; it had finally to do with the disciple's personal destiny in the consummated Kingdom: "He that confesseth me before men, him will I confess before my Father in heaven";⁶ "Whosoever shall be ashamed of me and of my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, the Son of Man also shall be ashamed of him,

¹ Mark 8:31; 9:12, 31; 10:32-34.

⁴ Mark 2:10.

² John 12:34.

⁵ Enoch 46:3.

³ Luke 24:44-48.

⁶ Matt. 10:32.

when he cometh in the glory of his Father with the holy angels."¹ Even John the Baptist, though he be greatest among all that are born of women, is less than the least in the Kingdom of God.² For entrance into the Kingdom is based upon—what the practice of the new righteousness presupposed and immediately connoted—faith in and relation to Jesus himself. It is, in fact, because he is the Son of Man that he has come to minister and to die, and so "give his life a ransom for many."³

This was the great stumbling-block and "stone of offense,"⁴ the "shame" of the Messiah,⁵ the scandal of his cross,⁶ in the first days of Christianity, as today. Many would-be disciples turned their backs upon him when he made this claim.⁷ Jesus' own messiahship and the doctrine of Messiah's death were as incongruous to their notions of the Kingdom and of the Messiah as they are incongruous, in only a slightly different way, to our modern liberal gospel of "the kingdom of social righteousness." Taken together they were as out of place in the scheme of things entertained by the sons of Zebedee⁸ as they were out of place in that charming historical novel, *The Life of Jesus*, by Ernest Renan.

This, then, was the place our Lord claimed for himself in the Kingdom of God, which he assumed, almost silently and without the slightest hesitancy or misgiving, as his natural place in the course of God's government of the world and the setting up of his everlasting reign. It was not merely that of the herald, for John the Baptist had been its herald—"Elias is come already." Nor was it as the teacher of the doctrine of the Kingdom, the enunciator of new and high ethical principles which were to conquer human hearts and transform society. Not at all; rather, the place which he assumed was that of the Son of Man, the divine and transcendent Messiah, the everlasting Christ; the one to stand before the Ancient of Days in glory; the one who should judge the nations and settle

¹ Mark 8:38; see the whole passage, 8:34—9:1; cf. Denney, *Jesus and the Gospel*, pp. 212, 284 ff.

² Matt. 11:11.

⁵ Heb. 12:2.

³ Mark 10:45.

⁶ Gal. 5:11.

⁴ Matt. 21:42.

⁷ John 6:66.

⁸ Mark 10:35 ff.

the final destiny of every member of the human race: "open and none shall close, close and none shall open" the way to the Kingdom of God.

Is it possible, in view of this, to say that his position in the worship of the Christian church is merely the result of a theologizing mood, into which Christianity fell sometime between Pentecost and the reign of Constantine? Could other men's estimation of Jesus ever be higher than his own self-estimation? Can it be asserted that the divinity or the deity of Jesus is the fabrication, pure and simple, of his ardent followers after he had been taken from them by death?

Let a man accept for himself the Christology of the Catholic creeds or not, as he will, it cannot be asserted that Christology was any *new* thing, any addition to the original gospel of our Lord, in the year 325, or in the year 110, or in the year 85, or 70, or 40, or 30. "Thou art the Christ," in the words of Peter's confession, contains just as dogmatic a Christology, is just as much an expression of faith in the terms of a hard and fast intellectual concept, as the Nicene creed. Christology began, or rather, was already complete, not only *in posse* but *in esse*, as far as the "exaltation" of our Lord is concerned, when Jesus of Nazareth returned to Galilee in the summer of the year 27 A.D.

CHAPTER V

THE KINGDOM AND HISTORY

We hoped that it was he who should redeem Israel.

—Luke 24:21.

We have indicated the way in which Jesus transformed the conception of the Kingdom. He did so, not so much by controverting the notions regarding the nature of the Kingdom popular in his day as by giving the whole subject a new emphasis on the side of men's preparation for its coming, by changing the center of gravity in the conception. And he retained the name, "the Kingdom of God": no one in his time would have understood had he used any other term for the coming reign of God than the term "Kingdom." More than that, he himself *meant* the Kingdom of God, not a colorless spiritual state, not the ideal and goal of mysticism.

In like manner he transformed the conception of the Messiah. To the vast majority of his fellow-countrymen "the Messiah" meant—what it had meant for a half-dozen and more generations—the one who was to set up the Kingdom under God's commission; who was to act as Judge in the great Judgment; who was to rule over the established Kingdom as God's viceroy. This was his official position. One hardly thought of the Messiah in a personal way; for all that he bore a human appearance and had the form of a man, as "one like unto a son of man," he was merely the official Vicar of God, "the personal *x* of the coming era of salvation."¹ What character he possessed was indistinct and angelic or immediately derived from God. He was God judging, God ruling, "the Arm of the Lord," "the Power of God," the personification of the activities of God in relation to the coming of the Kingdom. But Jesus made the messiahship a personal thing, and not merely official. In his teaching the Son of Man stands not for mere power of God, mere justice, mere wrath, mere beneficence, but a human-divine person, a man with God, the man of God; one who is *no*

¹ Volz, *Jüdische Eschatologie*, p. 215.

less divine than the popular official Messiah, but more human: the one who can say, at the Judgment, "Inasmuch as ye did it unto one of the least of these, *my brethren*, ye did it unto *me*. . . . For it was *I* who was cold, naked, hungry, in prison." Perhaps our Lord saw for this reason a special fitness in the apocalyptic term "Son of Man." For it might be made to represent, not only the divine glory and power of the Messiah, but also, along with this, his humanness, his humanity, his capacity for character.¹ At least, when he identified himself with the Son of Man, i.e., when he identified his self-appellation, already in use, with the *particular* "Son of Man" of Daniel's vision, which was more or less popularly understood to be the Messiah, he did so in the interest and for the purpose of manifesting the Messiah's character. He dared thus to call himself Messiah, knowing that it could not but cause perplexity, for this very purpose: to show to the disciples the Messiah's character. Henceforth they were not to continue regarding him as a saint or a prophet; but they were to think of the Messiah when they thought of him, and so to learn, from him, the Messiah's character.

If it was not for this purpose, then there could have been no particular reason whatever, so far as we can see, for giving away the secret of his own supernatural identity, even to the disciples. He might have left it unknown; he need never have raised the question, "Who do men . . . who do ye say that I am?"² He might have kept his "messianic consciousness" to himself, hidden in the depths of his own soul, and only to be revealed at the last, when the time had fully come, by the Father. But he disclosed

¹ For apart from the messianic expectation, which made of it a proper noun, "son of man" always meant simply a human being; it was so used in everyday speech in Palestine at the time of Jesus; it had so been used by Ezekiel as a self-designation, to contrast the weak humanity of the prophet with the divine greatness of God; and Ezekiel's prophecy was a part of the familiar sacred scripture. Even before the time of our Lord, and therefore outside his teaching, the humanness of the Messiah was involved in his title and position. We may see this in Enoch, where, for all the essentially divine characteristics of the Son of Man, he is yet quasi-human, possessing a human likeness. Thus the transcendent Son of Man bridged the ever-widening gulf between God and humanity, heaven and earth; he was a bond between humanity and divinity long before Philo and his Logos doctrine, or the Christian theology of the Incarnation. His office and function was similar to that accorded Wisdom in the speculations of the Wisdom literature.

² Mark 8:27 ff.

the secret; he confirmed Peter's faith in that identity at which he had hinted for months in his public and private teaching;¹ and he did so in order to further his teaching of the disciples. This we may take to be the motive of all his messianic teaching, of his messianic teaching in the light of his own self-revelation.

He disclaimed the limitations of his human nature in the very moment of that nature's supremest triumph. And this either mystified men or shocked and repelled them. This furnished the ground for the charge of blasphemy upon which the high priest and elders condemned him. He dared to call himself Messiah in order to make men see in his own character the *character* of the Messiah, not by any fiction, but as the expression of the deepest secret of his being. It was the secret, not only of his mighty works and deeds of mercy and of the whole course of his outer life in fulfilment of the divine anticipations and predictions of the Law and Prophets, but also of his inner life, the secret of his unshakable confidence in the mission which had been intrusted to him, his certainty of the imminence of the Kingdom, the authority with which he delivered his message, the perfect trust in the course which lay before him according to the will of the heavenly Father. But men saw only the madness of a Galilean rabbi who pretended to the throne of God, and so they crucified him. The daring involved in his claim was real only in so far as it invited outward difficulties and dangers. What he announced was not for him a venture of faith; there was no chasm, to be leaped in one sudden bound or slowly bridged by laborious reflection, between himself and the Son of Man sitting on the right hand of Power. He looked upon that identity as the secret of his existence, his individual *raison d'être*; he claimed that place with God as his eternal and inherent right. There was no sense of human unworthiness to sit at God's right hand. For the Father had sent him . . . and he returned to the Father.²

¹ Matt. 16:15-17.

² John 16:28; cf. 12:44-50; 13:1, 4; etc. It may be said that these verses fall all too naturally into line with the whole conception upon which the Fourth Gospel is based and which it is meant to prove; but see Mark 1:38; 2:17; Matt. 5:17; 10:34; Luke 10:16; etc., where our Lord speaks of his mission ("I came . . . I was sent") as one which has been given him by God. The consciousness of this mission goes back

Thus the Kingdom was a reality, and the messiahship was a reality. Just as real were they to him as to his contemporaries—intensely more real. For the Kingdom was coming, inevitably, by God's will and appointment. The time was fulfilled; the decree of heaven ordered change. And the only thing for men to do, the activity above all others which men should engage in, and at once, was to prepare for it. The Kingdom was no longer a dim hope, the expectation of a coming era, off in the indefinite future, which men longed for but were not sure of. To him it was inevitable fact. Its coming was imminent. It might come any day; certainly it could not delay beyond a few months, or a few years, at the farthest. It was the absolute thing in all his thinking; everything else hinged on that. It was his great idea, "luminous and self-evident" (not his only idea; he was no victim of an *idée fixe*), and it formed the basis of his teaching of others. Likewise, the messiahship; it was more real to him, even considered apart, if that be possible, from his own messianic self-consciousness, than to any others. For the divinity of the Son of Man was no mere consequence of his coming elevation, his official position before God, his power, and the authority to judge committed to him; but was by virtue of his godlikeness, his truth, mercy, and love, the perfection of his personal character. Not that his messiahship was a consequence of his human character, to be given him as a reward of merit; but in our Lord's mind the *marks* of his messiahship were not official powers merely, but personal characteristics—the marks of a godlike personal character. It was rooted in a personal union with God. This was already foreshadowed in that truly evangelical note in the "Son of Man vision" in Enoch:¹ "This is the Son of Man who hath righteousness, with whom righteousness dwells . . . because the Lord of Spirits hath chosen him, and his lot

at least to the Baptism—if it is not one which has been received altogether outside time and space. Into the depths of his messianic self-consciousness our Lord never once lets us peer; beyond a few hints, a few brief, positive statements, we are left to surmise and conjecture. Slight indeed are the data for a "psychology of messiahship." But we do know that he was conscious of a relation to the Father and of the Father to him, and of a mission which had been laid upon him by the Father, which far transcended the powers of human language to describe.

¹ 46:3.

before the Lord of Spirits hath surpassed everything in uprightness forever." His credentials were not signs and wonders, but words of truth and deeds of mercy. "He that rejecteth me, and receiveth not my sayings, hath one that judgeth him: the word that I spake, the same shall judge him in the last day."¹ "Go and tell John the things that ye hear and see: the blind receive their sight, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear, and the dead are raised up, and the poor have good tidings preached to them."² "Except ye see signs and wonders, ye will not believe," he told his hearers. But his appeal was to the heart and conscience of his generation, not to its imagination.

This was a completely real thing to him, so real that men thought him fanatical and insane, "possessed of a demon." The Kingdom and his own messiahship were the things for which he died; for the Kingdom and the messiahship were inseparably and unconditionally and forever bound up with his own person; they were facts as inevitable as his own self-identity. The high priest rent his robe when Jesus confessed that he was "the Christ, the Son of the Blessed," and added, "Henceforth ye shall see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of Power and coming with the clouds of heaven."³ And for this the members of the Sanhedrin condemned him, having found the final and sufficient charge to bring against him. The Kingdom and his own messiahship—they were realities *now*, but hereafter to be clearly manifested before all eyes, even before them who sit to judge him: "Ye shall see" the Messiah in glory. The Judgment was coming swiftly upon this generation. Men could not escape. The persecution and rejection of the Son of Man, as he came "eating and drinking," was the last weight thrown into the balance, the final provocation of the anger and judgment of God.

Thus suffering and dying, the Messiah was laying down his life as "a ransom for many," and establishing or ratifying in his own blood the new Covenant, in which the Law should be "written on the hearts," and "all should know Jehovah, from the least even unto the greatest."⁴ "Thus it behooved the Christ to suffer and enter into his glory"⁵—not a glory merely of standing at God's

¹ John 12:48.

³ Mark 14:63.

² Matt. 11:4, 5.

⁴ Jer. 31:31-34.

⁵ Luke 24:26.

right hand or sitting on the throne of clouds to judge mankind, for that was already his right; but the glory of removing all sins, of freeing his own from slavery to the Prince of Darkness and alienation from God, of reigning over the world, not only its judge, but its savior.

This was entirely a personal relationship in which he was living and into which he was thus more completely entering—a relationship with God and with all men, with every individual in the human race—which could suitably be expressed only by “Messiah,” “Son of Man”; and which nevertheless wholly transcended the messianic office. His messiahship was the inmost secret of his being; and yet messiahship was to him something immeasurably greater than the messianic office as represented in the apocalyptic writings; he stands in a relation to the Father, as Son, which can only be hinted at by referring to the vision of Daniel and to the notions of the messianic office derived from that source. And yet it is certain that no other term was available for expressing the rich and transcendent content of his personal spiritual relationship than the term “Messiah,” however insufficient that term. “The Messiah-idea was for Jesus the only possible form of his self-consciousness, and yet—an inadequate form; a necessity—but also a heavy burden, which he bore in silence until almost the end of his life; a conviction which gave him the inner hold upon himself, and yet at the same time brought him into insolvable outward difficulties.”¹ But it is perfectly idle, on the other hand, to say that the messiahship was a negligible factor in our Lord’s teaching regarding the Kingdom, or only an element of transient importance.

But now we ask, standing here on this vantage-ground of the twentieth century, with our world of other problems, other interests: Did the Kingdom of God ever come? What became of Christ’s promise, “Ye shall see the Son of Man coming with the clouds of heaven, sitting on the right hand of Power?” Did that ever take place? Or did the whole structure of apocalypsim, with its narrow program of history and grim, chiaroscuro map of the future, tumble into ruins on Good Friday, when Jesus of Nazareth was

¹ Bousset, *Jesus*, 3. Aufl., p. 82.

crucified, his body laid in a tomb in the garden, and his disciples scattered? Was it about these ruins that the apostolic church gathered and abode, vainly endeavoring to build it up again, which ruins remain today as interesting landmarks (and nothing more) in the church's theology of "the last things"? Is nothing left of Jesus' teaching except his beautiful ethical principles, his stress upon morals, his revelation of the loving heart of the heavenly Father? It is so, if the Kingdom and the messiahship were merely illusions.

There are not wanting men to assert the affirmative in answer to these latter questions. And it seems hard for Christians to answer otherwise than that the Kingdom never came, that the Messiah did not return, that the Judgment never took place.

This is no modern difficulty; it has been a difficulty since the very beginning of Christianity. That generation passed in which our Lord lived. Jerusalem and the temple were destroyed; all Jews—Pharisees, Sadducees, Christians ("Nazarenes")—all were scattered among the nations. The church was thrown out upon the world, where it grew and prospered in the face of horrible persecutions. It held together and grew in this earliest period, before it had any definite organization, for the simple reason that all Christians still looked for the coming of the Kingdom, for the Messiah, their Lord, to return. "Lord Jesus, come quickly," was their common and continual prayer.¹ Yet the years passed on; the clouds drifted eastward and returned to the west again, but with never "the sign of the Son of Man in heaven."² The waiting seemed interminable. Many asked, "Where is the promise of his coming? for from the day that the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of the creation."³ The more ardent redoubled their eager vigils and prayers, determined that when the Master of the house came, howsoever long he delayed his coming, he should find them "watching."

It was about this time or toward the close of the first century that a book was written which altered the whole of subsequent Christian history: the Gospel according to St. John. Its author had set himself to answer the questions which we have just asked,

¹ Rev. 22:20; I Cor. 16:22.

² Matt. 24:30.

³ II Pet. 3:4.

What became of the Kingdom, and of Jesus' promise, after the crucifixion? He was qualified to write; for he was none other than the "beloved disciple," the one who had been closest to our Lord in the old days in Galilee and Jerusalem; who had been close to him since; who had lived in his spirit, had steeped himself in his teaching, and upon whose loving soul had dawned at last the full meaning of Christ for the world.¹ Moreover, he had back of him the whole of the apostolic experience since that experience began: from the morning when he, with Peter, ran to the open sepulcher; from the days in the upper room when the risen Lord was with them; from the memorable day of Pentecost, when the Spirit came down upon them in the strange sacramental tongues of fire. He had lived through the eventful days of the first missionary preaching and testimony in Jerusalem and through all the eventful days since. He had followed the course of the church's growth in Asia, Europe, and Africa. He had himself borne testimony and suffered for the faith. He had engaged in the church's teaching. Unlike some others, he had not disdained to follow in the footsteps of that tremendous man, the Apostle to the Gentiles, with whose profound understanding of Christ he was acquainted and sympathetic. Now he writes and offers to the church an interpretation of the life and teaching of Jesus which combines the fruits of all this: his experience in Galilee and Jerusalem and Asia Minor; the experience of the early church; the teaching of Paul; the meaning Christ had had for him, personally, and had come to have for him through all the years. It was nothing new; it claimed for its authority only his own memory of the Master, interpreted in the light of a spiritual experience; its object was to draw men closer to Christ: "that ye may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and

¹ At the very least, John is *back of* the Fourth Gospel. He may have dictated some of it, or it may be a compilation of his "reminiscences," or it may be a product of "the school of Ephesus"; but, whichever it be, John is the link connecting it with the events which it narrates and the Lord whom it glorifies. The following paragraphs were written from the first point of view, viz., that the author of, or authority for, at least large sections (embodying chiefly the narrative rather than the discourse element) of the Fourth Gospel was "John the disciple of the Lord." But, with a few simple changes, the underlying hypothesis can be altered, and the present argument meantime loses none of its force.

that believing ye may have life in his name.”¹ What was *new* was the language, the vocabulary, the terminology. In place of the terminology of the old circle of ideas, Jewish, Aramaic, Palestinian, he uses the language of his neighbors, the Gentile Christians in Asia Minor, especially in Ephesus and in the region of the Greek Mediterranean. In place of “Son of Man,” “the Kingdom of God,” “the Judgment,” “the harvest,” “the clouds of heaven,” he translates into the language of the locality and of his experience: “the Life,” “the Light,” “the Word,” “the Truth,” “the Way,” “the Spirit.” Not that he drops one set of words absolutely, as if he were translating into another tongue; but he shifts the bearing of those words he retains, moving them into a different sphere of connotations. It is a new world of thought into which he is translating ideas for which there are no equivalents ready at hand: the thought-world of Hellenism, the intellectual environment of the Greek mind. It is as if the solution of an algebraic problem were to be presented in geometry, or poetry to be paraphrased in prose. The outward form is altered, not the essential meaning; in fact, the outward form is altered in order to *preserve* the essential meaning.

And this was completely justifiable. When John called Jesus “the Word”—the Logos—the one who is with the Father from and unto all eternity, he was claiming for our Lord no more than our Lord claimed when he called himself “the Son of Man.” The meaning of “Son of Man” would be lost on Greek Christians of Asia Minor, as, indeed, it has largely been lost on all Christendom since; just as “Logos,” “the Word,” would have been lost on the farmers and fishermen of Galilee. It is not the deification of Jesus which we witness when John opens his gospel with the sublime prologue, “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. . . .” This was a conception of deity current in Asia Minor and in the predominantly Greek half of the Mediterranean world, which had permeated popular thought from contact with the philosophical schools. And he was simply substituting this picture for the picture taken from the vision of Daniel, of the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven, which

¹ John 20:31.

had been current in Galilee and used by our Lord. It is only the translation of *values*, of essential meanings, which we see in the Fourth Gospel. Jesus had identified himself with the Son of Man in the vision of Daniel; and then he had made this messiahship to mean a position, a place in the world and its history which brought him into the closest personal relationship to all mankind; and his relation to the Father, conceived in these terms, was a closeness and likeness approaching to identity.¹ Our Lord used the term "the Son of Man"; but on his lips it came to have a tenfold deeper meaning—more personal, more vital, more spiritual—than the merely official meaning which it had for his contemporaries or in the apocalyptic literature. He used the term "the Kingdom of God"; but in his use of the phrase it acquired a meaning far transcending the bare significance which it had for Jewish eschatology. To him it was the absolute idea; it represented the totality of the relationship of the world to God, of individuals in the world to God—and of God to the world and to individuals—of conduct to history and to final destiny, of human character to the goal of creation. It was ever of this that he was thinking when he used the term. And when John represents our Lord as saying, "I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life; no man cometh to the Father but by me,"² the first half of the sentence is only a paraphrase, a translation into the terms of common thought, of the *significance* of its latter half. And this latter half, "No one cometh to the Father but by me," is almost word for word the synoptic record: "All things have been delivered unto me of my Father; and no one knoweth . . . the Father save the Son, and he to whom the Son willeth to reveal Him."³ When he represents our Lord as

¹ This is precisely the way in which John represents our Lord in his Gospel: Christ is the Logos, in the bosom of the Father from all eternity, 1:1-3; and also, the light which lighteth every man, and the life of creation, 1:4, 9. The Logos is *that which binds God and humanity together*; cf. Wendland, *Hellenistisch-römische Kultur*, p. 41. The conception of the Logos had been current for at least three centuries, woven into the metaphysics of various popular schools of philosophy, and had already been made a part of the theology of St. Paul, as may be seen from the first chapter of the epistle to the Colossians. And as for pre-existence, we have seen above how this was involved in the messiahship of the Son of Man, according to Enoch. There are scholars who maintain that this is true even in Daniel; cf. Bousset, *Religion des Judentums*, p. 306 ff.

² John 14:6.

³ Matt. 11:27.

saying, "I and the Father are one,"¹ he is representing our Lord as saying something which, if he did not say, he might just as well have said, barring, of course, the situation, and the unlikelihood of his addressing a promiscuous crowd gathered in the temple area in just such words. Our Lord made statements to his disciples, in parable and in common forms of speech, equally as significant as this. For Jesus did place himself, if not in the words of John's Gospel, then certainly in the words of the Synoptic Gospels, in the closest relationship possible or imaginable to God and to the human race. He was conscious of the *absolute worth* of himself, his indispensable value for history and for humanity. He interposed himself, without the slightest tremor of hesitation or misgiving, between God and the whole human race; and that for the sole purpose of drawing them together. In the final crisis which was coming upon the whole world, the Day of Judgment, he himself was to be the Heaven-appointed Judge, from whose sentence there was no appeal: "Enter into life." . . . "Depart from me ye cursed." The basis of this judgment, the evidence or testimony, should have to do with a personal relationship—the relationship of mortal men to the immortal Son of Man,² a relationship which is begun, sustained, and perfected in the practice of the righteousness of God.³

All words are symbolic. The commonest expressions of daily speech are only sounds which we have arbitrarily determined shall stand for certain things or relations, or for the images of things—ideas. The word "house" is no more really a house than the arbitrary symbol *x*, or *y*, or *z*. And in the last analysis, the phrase, "the Kingdom of God," as used by our Lord or even by others, is a symbol, and no more than a symbol, for an idea transcending utterance. Speech fails at a certain altitude of thought. We simply run out of our stock of fitting symbols when we come to express ideas of things outside or above our experience, or to express to others what is outside their experience. In order to convey what

¹ John 10:30.

² Matt. 25:31-46; Mark 8:38; John 5:22-24; 12:48.

³ Matt. 7:21 ff.

was *not* outside his own experience, but outside the experience of others, Jesus had to adopt, in speaking to others, terms within their comprehension—terms, ideas, which were built up out of their experience.¹ For we can no more than faintly symbolize, by means of words, those things which we have experienced or which have been the objects of our thought, but which are unknown quantities to others. A deaf, blind, insentient being is inevitably doomed to exclusion from the transfer of ideas which we effect through speech and writing and gesture: x means as much to one who has never seen or touched or heard a living animal as any name in zoölogy.

Jesus' experience transcends ours. To speak to us, he must use words which only approximate—and finally fail to convey—his real and entire meaning. That he did, as a matter of fact, reach the limits of human comprehension in the minds of his disciples is evident enough in the Gospels, from his oft-expressed sorrow over their ignorance.² That he out-fathoms our comprehensions also is evident enough from two facts, which together form a paradox: the inexplicableness to us of his experience, and his complete consistency. It is still a mystery, this experience which was his; and will doubtless ever remain so, the fundamental mystery, the "secret" of Christianity. And it is a mystery, and not an illusion, simply for the reason that, while it remains inexplicable, it is still consistent and explains his whole life and conduct. His words and his actions throughout the entire part of his life with which we are familiar, the two years from his baptism to his crucifixion, were harmonious and form a coherent unity. His personality, though utterly eluding our greatest efforts at comprehension and biography, was still a personality. Here was man, but also, here was more than man.

And when John represented Jesus as saying in other forms of speech what he had once said in the forms of speech which men in Palestine had daily used, the representation was justifiable. More than that, it was the only way in which the Gospel could be made

¹ Cf. Whetham, *Foundations of Science*, p. 17 f., for the scientific parallel to this.

² Mark 4:13; Matt. 15:16; 16:5-12; 17:17; Luke 22:38; etc.

intelligible in the new surroundings; it was the first attempt to cope with the problem which has been and is for the church the perennial problem, both missionary and theological. For he was attempting to express, in language which his readers could better understand, things really beyond all utterance. His apostolic position and experience, his relationship to Christ, qualified him, as hardly another man before or since was qualified, to interpret in a new set of terms, to a new generation, another race, the mind of Christ. It is not that he succeeded in setting forth in Greek what Jesus had failed to set forth in Aramaic; but that he endeavored to translate into the religious terminology of his locality and time what was in reality beyond the power of any human language to convey. Whether in Greek or in Aramaic, whether in the terminology of mystical philosophy or in the terminology of the Jewish hope, there is a sense of the absoluteness of Christ's relationship to humanity and to God which, in the end, simply cannot be conveyed by words; and which, at the same time, goes back to our Lord himself. It is at this altitude of thought that we run out of suitable symbols. And, like Peter on the Transfiguration mount, when he "wist not what to say,"¹ we lack idea symbols, we are without speech. For words are symbols of our experience, and our speech cannot pass beyond its limits; and we have not entered into and shared our Lord's experience. John is dealing with a life and a body of teaching in which there ever remains an unanalyzable residuum, an untranslatable sense, whether he writes in the language of Jewish patriotic idealism or of Hellenistic mysticism. And yet the life must be "manifested" and the teaching must be conveyed, however imperfectly or at whatever cost of effort. It was under this overpowering constraint that the Fourth Gospel was produced, the first great missionary *apologia* for Christianity.

It all lies around this secret of Christianity, of Christian thought, of Christian progress: Christianity is founded upon an experience passing our comprehension, but yet—although incomprehensible, unsounded, and beyond all words²—capable in some measure of appropriation by men of every nation and tongue under heaven.

¹ Mark 9:6 AV.

² Cf. I Cor. 2:6-9.

It is the living Person who is yet in the world, conquering it, spiritualizing it, redeeming and regenerating it, it is he who came to the Jewish nation some years before the destruction of Jerusalem and promised safety and salvation in the coming universal Judgment on condition of repentance; who proclaimed, "the Kingdom of God is at hand: repent and believe the good tidings"; who unveiled, before his nearest followers, to such a degree "as they were able to bear it," somewhat of the secret of his true identity; who claimed to be the final Judge and to sit, by right of divine appointment, on the throne at God's right hand; who laid down his life a ransom for many.

The kingdom, though it did not appear as he anticipated, or as his immediate followers anticipated, nevertheless stands for an eternal transcendent verity, the perfected relation of the world to God; the Life, beyond comprehension, which sustains and animates humanity in its upward strivings toward eternal light—the "light which lighteth every man coming into the world"—the goal of creation, not yet attained—of the creation which is still in the hands of its Maker (whose Sabbath has never yet come: "My Father worketh hitherto")—the victorious and completed conquest of the universe, which shall end in the reign of God, "when God shall be all in all." And though the Kingdom itself has never come in its anticipated form, still there entered the world a power as of God himself, which has continually and persistently made for righteousness, for sanctity, for regeneration—the spirit of Christ, the Holy Ghost. The strivings of the universe are not ended; but what its final goal shall be, for the revelation of which, as Paul said, it "groans in expectation," we know. This final goal, which seemed so near to our Lord, but which has never yet been attained, he named "the Kingdom of God," the most suitable title afforded by contemporary thought and charged with far greater meaning than his contemporaries knew—with a meaning which the thought of nineteen centuries has served only in slight measure to unfold. It is this everlasting Kingdom, militant in the church but superior to the church, which is the end, the goal toward which Christianity still strives and struggles—strives, not to bring about nor to create,

but to prepare men for, by repentance and faith. The Kingdom has never come; and yet the Kingdom is sure to come. Its full realization, its manifestation, its "coming," is still in the vast uncharted future; it still lies, as it lay in the days of Jesus, totally outside the reach of human effort, secure within the heavenly Father's keeping. But of one thing at least the Christian is certain: a world such as this cannot continue forever; a world such as that cannot forever remain unrealized.